

GENERAL PAPER

8807/02

Paper 2

29 August 2016

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READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

This Insert contains the passages for Paper 2.

Passage 1. *Sam Harris discusses the problems with lying.*

- 1 Deception can take many forms, but not all acts of deception are lies. A person in a hurry might pretend not to notice an acquaintance passing by on the street. A polite host might not acknowledge that a guest has said something stupid. When asked ‘How are you?’, most of us reflexively say that we are well, understanding the question to be merely a greeting, rather than an invitation to discuss our career disappointments, our marital troubles, or the condition of our bowels. Omissions of this kind can be forms of deception, but they are not quite lies. We may skirt the truth at such moments, but we do not deliberately manufacture falsehood or conceal important facts to the detriment of others. To lie is to intentionally mislead others when they expect honest communication. 5
- 2 People lie so that others will form beliefs that are not true, to avoid embarrassment, to exaggerate their accomplishments and to disguise wrongdoing. They make promises they do not intend to keep. They conceal defects in their products or services. They mislead competitors to gain an advantage. Many lie to friends and family members to spare their feelings. However, when we presume to lie for the benefit of others, we have decided that we are the best judges of how much they should understand about their own lives. Unless someone is suicidal or otherwise on the brink, deciding how much he should know about himself seems the quintessence of arrogance. What attitude could be more disrespectful of those we care about? 10 15
- 3 In many walks of life, we find otherwise normal men and women caught in the same trap and busily making the world much less good than it could be. Elected officials ignore long-term problems because they must pander to the short-term interests of voters. People working for insurance companies rely on technicalities to deny desperately ill patients the care they need. CEOs and investment bankers run extraordinary risks because they reap the rewards of success without suffering the penalties of failure. Lawyers continue to prosecute people they know to be innocent because their careers depend on winning cases. Our government fights a war on drugs that creates the very problem of black-market profits and violence that it pretends to solve. 20 25
- 4 Most of us are now painfully aware that our trust in government, corporations, and other public institutions have been undermined by lies. Lying has precipitated or prolonged wars. When the truth finally emerges after wars, people grow more cynical and come to doubt the legitimacy of any military intervention, whatever the stated motive. Pharmaceutical companies have also been widely criticised for misleading the public about the safety and efficacy of their drugs. This misinformation comes in many degrees, but some of it is surely the result of conscious attempts to rig the data. New drugs are often compared with placebos rather than with standard therapies. More egregious still, pharmaceutical companies routinely hide negative results. For certain drugs, more than 50 per cent of the trial data has been withheld. Consequently, the industry-funded trials are four times as likely to show the benefits of a new drug. 30 35
- 5 Big lies have led many people to reflexively distrust those in positions of authority. As a result, it is now impossible to say anything of substance on numerous subjects without many expressing paralysing doubts about even the most reputable sources of information. The need for state secrets is obvious. However, the need for governments to lie to their own people seems to me to be virtually non-existent. Justified government deception is a kind of ethical mirage: Just when you think you are reaching for it, the facts usually suggest otherwise. The harm occasioned whenever lies of this kind are uncovered is all but irreparable. 40 45

- 6 Most forms of private vice and public evil are kindled and sustained by lies. Acts of adultery and other personal betrayals, financial fraud and government corruption generally require a moral defect: a willingness to lie. By lying, we deny others our view of the world. Our dishonesty not only influences the choices they make. It often determines the choices they can make – in ways we cannot always predict. Every lie is an assault on the autonomy of those we lie to. 50
- 7 The lies of the powerful lead us to distrust governments and corporations. The lies of the weak make us callous toward the suffering of others. The lies of the conspiracy theorists raise doubts about the honesty of whistle-blowers, even when they are telling the truth. Lies are the social equivalent of toxic waste. Everyone is potentially harmed by their spread. 55

Passage 2. *Steven Mazie argues that there are reasons for telling lies.*

- 1 I found myself with furrowed brow over Sam Harris' absolutist stance against telling tales. Is it true that we can radically simplify our lives and improve society by merely telling the truth in situations where others often lie? Should we consider white lies as sinful as blatant lies? Is fibbing to make someone feel better as morally outrageous as lying to the world about a sexting affair or a scandal? 5
- 2 As a new fan of the Netflix series *House of Cards*, I find Harris' red line against deception curious. You do not have to admire the two-faced, manipulative characters on the show to find a smidgen of yourself in there somewhere. You also do not have to be a Machiavellian to see some truth in Machiavelli's dictum that success requires exercising a little cunning. If you forswear playing the fox, you will eventually get played for the fool. Yet Harris, doe-eyed and staring straight into the camera, tells us how he lied to his five-year-old daughter 'only once'. He recounted how they were looking for nursery rhymes on the Internet and landed on a page that showed a 16th-century woodcut of a person being decapitated. He was hurriedly scrolling elsewhere and his daughter demanded to know what they had just seen. He said something silly, 'That was an old and very impractical form of surgery.' According to him, this left his daughter perplexed and she remained unaware of man's inhumanity to man to this day. However, I doubt that even that lie was necessary. 10 15
- 3 This little example serves to establish Harris as nearly as human as the rest of us. Even moral absolutists can err, he implies, but they can mend their ways. But is there anything to mend here? What exactly is wrong with the way Harris responded to his daughter's question? His anecdote illustrates one good reason to lie: to protect the innocence of very young children. I am not arguing parents should present the world as all sugarplums and fairy dust. My claim is that there is no good reason to explain the details of fundamentalist religious terrorism to a three-year-old, or medieval torture to a four-year-old. When my daughters were three and four and we arrived on this page of the book 'Madeline and the Bad Hat', the question inevitably arose: what is that thing? I explained away the guillotine as a device for chopping onions. And I felt no compunction about telling the lie. 20 25

- 4 Some time later, once the girls were fully aware that real-life dead chickens are an essential ingredient in chicken soup, I disclosed that the guillotine was actually used to chop off the chickens' heads. They gulped but did not freak out. Most notably, they did not seem horrified or insulted that I had withheld this information from them. A little later, I went a step further and explained that guillotines were not designed only, or primarily, for chickens. My girls understood that as they became more mature, they were able to handle more information about this neck-slicing apparatus without bursting into tears. They appreciated, quietly but surely, that I did not spill all the beans when they were wee. 30 35
- 5 Nobody should aspire to living a lie, but a life without some self-deception would be hard to navigate. We fool ourselves into doing a lot of difficult and painful and expensive but good and worthy things, from running marathons to having children to going to graduate school. Doing truth-laid-bare cost-benefit analyses of every decision we face is no way to confront the challenges of life. 40
- 6 So my article, Three Good Reasons to Tell a Lie, gives you two good reasons to tell a lie. I admit I have deceived you. I do not have a third. There was just something about the headline "Two Good Reasons to Tell a Lie" that seemed a little lacking.