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Paper 2

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William Damon considers the value of honesty.

- 1 No civilization can tolerate a fixed expectation of dishonest communications without falling apart from a breakdown in mutual trust. All human relations rely upon confidence that those in the relations will, as a rule, tell the truth. Honesty builds and solidifies a relationship with trust; and too many breaches in honesty can corrode relations beyond repair. Friendships, family, work, and civic relations all suffer whenever dishonesty comes to light. The main reason that no one wants to be known as a liar is that people shun liars because they can't be trusted. 5

- 2 Honesty's vital role in human society has been observed and celebrated for all of recorded history. The Romans considered the goddess Veritas to be the "mother of virtue"; Confucius considered honesty to be the essential source of love, communication, and fairness between people; and of course, the Bible's Old Testament prohibited bearing false witness. It is also noteworthy that the two most universally heralded U. S. presidents (George Washington, who "could not tell a lie," and Abraham Lincoln, who was known as "Honest Abe") were widely acclaimed for their trustworthiness. 10

- 3 In a similar vein, religious leader Gordon Hinckley has written that, "where there is honesty, other virtues will follow"—indicating, as did the Romans, the pivotal role of truthfulness in all moral behavior and development. Hinckley's comment was made in the context of his alarm-sounding book on "neglected virtues," and it points to the problematic status of honesty in our society today. Although truthfulness is essential for good human relationships and personal integrity, it is often abandoned in pursuit of other life priorities. 15 20

- 4 Indeed, there may be a perception in many key areas of contemporary life—law, business, politics, among others—that expecting honesty on a regular basis is a naïve and foolish attitude, a "loser's" way of operating. Such a perception is practically a mandate for personal dishonesty and a concession to interpersonal distrust. When we no longer assume that those who communicate with us are at least trying to tell the truth, we give up on them as trustworthy persons and deal with them only in a strictly instrumental manner. The bounds of mutual moral obligation dissolve, and the laws of the jungle reemerge. 25

- 5 Our serious problem today is not simply that many people routinely tell lies. People have departed from the truth for one reason or another all throughout human history. The problem now is that we seem to be reaching a dysfunctional tipping point in which an essential commitment to truthfulness no longer seems to be assumed in our society. If this is indeed the case, the danger is that the bonds of trust important in any society, and essential for a liberal one, will dissolve so that the kinds of discourse required to self-govern will become impossible. 30 35

- 6 In former days, there was not much hesitancy in our society about using a moral language to teach children essential virtues such as honesty. For us today, it can be a culture shock to leaf through old editions of the McGuffey Readers, used in most American schools until the mid-twentieth century, to see how readily educators once dispensed unambiguous moral lessons to students. Nowadays, when cheating is considered by some teachers to be an excusable response to a difficult assignment, or even a form of pro-social activity, our society risks a future of moral numbness brought on by a decline of honesty and all the virtues that rely on it. As the Founders of our Republic warned, the failure to cultivate virtue in citizens can be a lethal threat to any democracy. 40

Anna Chui considers the merits of lying.

- 1 Liar, liar, pants on fire. No one wants to get caught in a lie and appear to be dishonest or deceptive. But does telling a lie actually make you either of those things? The truth is, there are some advantages to lying, and they aren't always for self-gain. Sometimes people choose to lie to protect others and spare their feelings. Because let's face it, the truth hurts. 5

- 2 We all need to take a moment to be honest with ourselves and admit that we all lie. It is in our innate nature to deceive and sometimes protect. Yes, we sometimes tell lies to cover up bad behavior, manipulate others, or rise to power and attain what we want. But we also lie to spare the feelings of others, avoid unnecessary conflict, or to simply brighten up someone's day. 10

- 3 Researchers believe that the act of lying came into play after the development of language. It is the evolution of deceptive strategy, just as animals use camouflage to deceive their predators or prey. In terms of efficiency, lying is the easiest way to rise to power and attain resources. If your enemy is larger and stronger than you, then physical force will not be very effective. But if you are able to outwit and manipulate your enemy, not only can you acquire their resources, you can also make them believe that it was their own idea. 15

- 4 In actuality, we are conditioned to lie at a young age. Didn't your parents tell you to always thank your host for that "delicious" meal that you had to choke down? Social graces aside, it's still a lie. Children typically learn to lie between the ages of 2 and 5. When children first begin to lie at the age of 2, it is an indication that they are starting to test out their independence. They lie simply to see what they can get away with. By the age of 8, the children actually have the capacity of lying to spare the feelings of others. The results of the study found that these lies are motivated by empathy and compassion rather than deceit and manipulation. 20
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- 5 Some lies are well intentioned - meant to protect those who are being lied to. Lying has even been found to have psychological benefits for the liar. Those who are extremely honest with themselves are more prone to depression than those who are not. Overtly honest people are often construed as blunt, sometimes even pathological. There are even interpersonal benefits to be gained from lying and knowing when it is okay to do so. In fact, if someone detects that you have lied to them to protect them, it could increase the trust that they have in you. These well intentioned lies are known as pro-social lies. In this case, our choice to lie is a result of moral and emotional reasoning. We prioritize kindness over the importance of truth to spare other persons involved. As our brains develop, our moral reasoning progresses at the same rate as self-control as well as cognitive ability. 30
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- 6 Further still, the most selfless of lies is known as a blue lie. These lies tend to be altruistic falsities that are actually told at the cost of the liar to protect someone else. In this case, we might subject ourselves to punishment for the wrongdoing of others.

- 7 Honestly, lying isn't so bad. What determines the magnitude of the lie is the intent behind it. Lies that are told to protect others can actually help to strengthen relationships. Other lies that are told to embellish one's image are debatably harmless. It all boils down to one fact - we all have our reasons for the lies that we tell and the facts that we choose not to share. Sometimes a tiny lie is necessary to ensure that all is well and all runs smoothly. At the end of the day, what we don't know won't hurt us. 40

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