

AN ESSAY ON THE NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF DECEPTION AND TELLING LIES

SK Mishra
Dept. of Economics,
NEHU, Shillong (India)
Contact: mishrasknehu@yahoo.com

1. What is a lie? A lie may be defined as an untrue assertion expressed as truth. In certain cases, truth might be told in such a manner that it appears to be false. These acts also may be considered as cases of telling lies. The theological definition of a lie is "to deny others access to knowledge to which they are entitled". These two definitions of lie are quite comprehensive.

The Dictionary.com definition of a lie is "a false statement made with deliberate intent to deceive; an intentional untruth; a falsehood." Thus considered, a lie is a type of deception in the form of an untruthful statement, especially with the intention to deceive others, often with the further intention to maintain a secret or reputation, protect someone's feelings or to avoid a punishment or repercussion for one's actions. Viewed as such, "to lie" is to state something that one knows to be false or that one does not honestly believe to be true with the intention that a person will take it for the truth. These meanings of a lie are rather narrow, since they limit a lie to the 'verbal' statement while a lie might be non-verbal as well. Lying when typically used to refer to deceptions in oral or written communication has thus a narrow connotation. Other forms of deception, such as disguises or forgeries, are generally not considered lies, though the underlying intent may be the same. Even a true statement can be used to deceive. In this situation, it is the intent of being overall untruthful rather than the truthfulness of any individual statement that is considered the basis of the lie. Further, an untrue statement, believed not to be so by the speaker, would not be a lie, irrespective of its effects (Wikipedia: Lie).

2. Deception and lies among the non-human beings: The capacity to lie has also been claimed to be possessed by non-humans in language studies with great apes. Even Koko, the gorilla made famous for learning American Sign Language has been caught red handed. After tearing a steel sink from the wall in the middle of a tantrum, she signed to her handlers that a cat did it, while she pointed to her kitten. It is unclear if this was a joke or a genuine attempt at blaming her tiny pet. Deceptive body language, such as feints that mislead as to the intended direction of attack or flight, is observed in many species including wolves. A mother bird deceives when it pretends to have a broken wing to divert the attention of a perceived predator, including unwitting humans, from the eggs in its nest to itself, most notably the killdeer (Wikipedia: Lie).

These instances obviously indicate that 'to lie' is natural and an ability to lie might be evolutionary in nature possibly to help in survival, since in the non-human world there is no point in raising the ethical issues. Extended to the humans (as a member of the *Animalia* or *Metazoa*), 'to lie' may only be a part of the survival mechanism. The cliché "All is fair in love and war" finds justification for lies used to gain advantage in the war situations. Sun Tzu (see Giles, 2005) declared that "All warfare is based on deception." Machiavelli advised in *the Prince* (see Marriott, 2006): "never to attempt to win by force what can be won by deception". The doctrine of reason-of-state holds that states and rulers, being charged with supreme responsibility for their subjects' peace and security, are not obliged to observe the principles of morality if prudence and policy dictated otherwise. In this doctrine dissimulation takes its place as an accepted method. The adage, "*Qui nescit dissimulare nescit regnare*" meaning that he who does not know

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how to dissimulate doesn't know how to rule, fully justifies deceit, deception and lies as the necessities of a ruler (Zagorin, 1996). Thomas Hobbes (1651) wrote in *Leviathan*: "In war, force and fraud are the two cardinal virtues." In the biological perspective, the world presents a war of each against all others. Thus viewed, lies are the cardinal virtues for survival and, by implication, the carriers of evolution. To quote Nietzsche (1878: 104): "If we accept self defense as moral, then we must also accept nearly all expressions of so called immoral egoism; we inflict harm, rob or kill, to preserve or protect ourselves, to prevent personal disaster; where cunning and dissimulation are the correct means of self preservation, we lie." Also, "Why do men usually tell the truth in daily life? Certainly not because a god has forbidden lying. Rather it is because, first, it is more convenient: for lies demand imagination, dissembling, and memory. Then, it is because it is advantageous in ordinary circumstances to say directly: I want this, I did that, and so on; that is, because the path of obligation and authority is safer than that of cunning. If a child has been raised in complicated domestic circumstances, however, he will employ the lie naturally, and will always say instinctively that which corresponds to his interests. A feeling for truth, a distaste for lying in and of itself, is alien to him and inaccessible; and so he lies in complete innocence." (Nietzsche, 1878: 54). Chandler and Afifi (1996) observe that the telling of successful lies requires a measure of admirable cognitive complexity and the ability to tell a really good journeyman sort of lie, one that will not come back to haunt the liar, is a skill that is slow to be acquired.

3. Lying to oneself or self-deception: Self-deception is a process of denying or rationalizing away the relevance, significance, or importance of opposing evidence and logical argument. Self-deception involves convincing oneself of a truth (or otherwise) so that one does not reveal any self-knowledge of the deception. Nietzsche (1878: 483) proclaims that convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies. Therefore, consensus on the identification of self-deception has remained elusive. As a result, there are two schools of thought on the conceptualization of self-deception: intentionalist and non-intentionalist. The Intentionalists tend to hold that self-deception is intentional, but differ from the non-intentionalists over whether it requires the holding of contradictory beliefs. They incorporate elements of temporal partitioning (extended over time to benefit the self-deceiver, increasing the chance of forgetting the deception altogether) and psychological partitioning (incorporating various aspects of the "self"). The Non-Intentionalists, in contrast, tend to believe that cases of self-deception are not necessarily accidental, but motivated by desire, anxiety, or some other emotion regarding a statement/proposition, *p*, or related to *p*. This notion distinguishes self-deception from misunderstanding. Furthermore, "wishful thinking" is distinguished from self-deception in that the self-deceivers recognize evidence against their self-deceptive belief or possess, without recognizing, greater counterevidence than wishful thinkers (Wikipedia: Self-deception).

It has been theorized that humans are susceptible to self-deception because most people have emotional attachments to beliefs, which in some cases may be irrational. Some evolutionary biologists, such as Robert Trivers, have suggested that deception plays a significant part in human behaviour, and in animal behavior, more generally speaking. One deceives oneself to trust something that is not true as to better convince others of that truth. When a person convinces her or himself of this untrue thing, s/he better masks the signs of deception (Trivers, 2002).

Trivers holds that deception is a fundamental aspect of communication in nature, both between and within species. It has evolved so that one can have an advantage over another. From alarm calls to mimicry, animals use deception to further their survival. Those who are better able to perceive deception are more likely to survive. As a result, self-deception evolved to better mask deception from those who perceive it well, as Trivers puts it: "Hiding the truth from yourself to hide it more deeply from others." In humans, awareness of the fact that one is acting deceptively often leads to tell-tale signs of deception, such as nostrils flaring, clammy skin, quality and tone of voice, eye movement, or excessive blinking. Therefore,

if self-deception enables someone to believe her or his own distortions, s/he will not present such signs of deception and will therefore appear to be telling the truth.

It may also be argued that the ability to deceive, or self-deceive, is not the selected trait but a by-product of a more primary trait called *abstract thinking*. Abstract thinking allows many evolutionary advantages such as more flexible, adaptive behaviors and innovation. Since a lie is an abstraction, the mental process of creating a lie can only occur in animals with enough brain complexity to permit abstract thinking. Self-deception lowers cognitive cost; that is to say, it is less complicated for one to behave or think in a certain manner that implies something is true, if s/he has convinced her/himself that that very thing is indeed true. The mind will not have to think constantly of the true thing and then the false thing, but simply convince her or himself that the false thing is true.

Because there is deceit, there exists a strong selection to recognize when deception occurs. As a result, self-deception evolved so as to better hide the signs of deception from others. The presence of deception explains the existence of an innate ability to commit self-deception to hide the indications of deceptions. Humans deceive themselves in order to better deceive others and thus have an advantage over them. Over the years since Trivers introduced his adaptive theory of self-deception, there has been a lot of controversy over the question of such behavior having a genetic basis.

The explanation of deception and self-deception as innate characteristics is perhaps true, but there are very many other explanations for this pattern of behavior. It is possible that the ability to self-deceive is not innate, but a learned trait, acquired through experience.

4. The taxonomy of lies: St. Augustine of Hippo (4th Century AD) wrote two books about lying: *On Lying (De Mendacio)* and *Against Lying (Contra Mendacio)*. He describes each book in his later work, *Retractions*. The first work, *On Lying*, begins: "Magna quæstio est de Mendacio". From his text, it can be derived that St. Augustine divided lies into eight categories, listed in order of descending severity (Wikipedia: Lie).

- Lies in religious teaching.
- Lies that harm others and help no one.
- Lies that harm others and help someone.
- Lies told for the pleasure of lying.
- Lies told to "please others in smooth discourse."
- Lies that harm no one and that help someone.
- Lies that harm no one and that save someone's life.
- Lies that harm no one and that save someone's "purity."

Augustine believed that "jocose lies" are not, in fact, lies. In the Veda Vyasa's *Mahābhārata*, there are many instances when a venerable person cursing a victim/culprit utters that the curse could not be untrue since he had never spoken a lie *even in jokes* (e.g. Shringi's curse to king Parikshita, *The Mahābhārata*, Āstika Parva, Ch. 42, verses 1-2). Such utterances indicate that jocose lies were generally not considered very seriously.

Lies may be alternatively classified as follows (see Wikipedia: Lie).

(i) Big lie: A lie which attempts to trick the victim into believing something major which will likely be contradicted by some information the victim already possesses, or by their common sense. Therefore, tricking a victim to believe such a lie is difficult.

(ii) Bluffing: To bluff is to pretend to have a capability or intention one does not actually possess. Bluffing is an act of deception that is rarely seen as immoral when it takes place in the context of a game where this kind of deception is consented to in advance by the players. For instance, a gambler who deceives other players into thinking he has different cards to those he really holds, or an athlete who hints he will move left and then dodges right is not considered to be lying (also known as a *feint*). In these situations, deception is acceptable and is commonly expected as a tactic.

(iii) Barefaced lie: A barefaced (or bald-faced) lie is one that is obviously a lie to those hearing it. The phrase comes from 17th-century British usage referring to those without facial hair as being seen as particularly forthright and outwardly honest, and therefore more likely to get away with telling a significant lie. A variation that has been in use almost as long is *bold-faced lie*, referring to a lie told with a straight and confident face (hence "bold-faced"), usually with the corresponding tone of voice and emphatic body language of one confidently speaking the truth.

(iv) Contextual lie: One can state part of the truth out of context, knowing that without complete information, it gives a false impression. Likewise, one can actually state accurate facts, yet deceive with them. To say "yeah, that's right, I ate *all* the white chocolate, by myself" utilizing a sarcastic, offended tone, may cause the listener to assume the speaker did not mean what he said, when in fact he did.

(v) Economical with the truth: Economical with the truth is popularly used as a euphemism for deceit, whether by volunteering false information (i.e., lying) or by deliberately holding back relevant facts. More literally, it describes a careful use of facts so as not to reveal too much information.

(vi) Emergency lie: An emergency lie is a strategic lie told when the truth may not be told because, for example, harm to a third party would result. For example, a neighbor might lie to an enraged wife about the whereabouts of her unfaithful husband, because said wife might reasonably be expected to inflict physical injury should she encounter her husband in person. Alternatively, an emergency lie could denote a (temporary) lie told to a second person because of the presence of a third.

(vii) Exaggeration: An exaggeration (or hyperbole) occurs when the most fundamental aspects of a statement are true, but only to a certain degree. It is also seen as "stretching the truth" or making something appear more powerful, meaningful, or real than it actually is.

(viii) Fabrication: A fabrication is a lie told when someone submits a statement as truth, without knowing for certain whether or not it actually *is* true. Although the statement may be possible or plausible, it is not based on fact. Rather, it is something made up, or it is a misrepresentation of the truth. A person giving directions to a tourist when the person doesn't actually know the directions is in fact indulgent in fabrication. Often propaganda is classified as a fabrication.

(ix) Jocular lie: Jocular lies are lies meant in jest, intended to be understood as such by all present parties. Teasing and sarcasm are examples. A more elaborate instance is seen in some storytelling traditions, where the humour comes from the storyteller's insistence that the story is the absolute truth, despite all evidence to the contrary (i.e., tall tale). There is debate about whether these are "real" lies.

(x) Lie-to-children: A lie-to-children is a lie, often a platitude, which may use euphemism(s), which is told to make an adult subject acceptable to children. Common examples include "The stork brought you" (in reference to childbirth), etc.

(xi) Lying by obsolete signage: Examples are the continued use of old stationery that has printed information such as a previous telephone number, or advertising that remains painted on a wall after an enterprise has ceased business.

(xii) Lying by omission: One lies by omission by omitting an important fact, deliberately leaving another person with a misconception. Lying by omission includes failures to correct pre-existing misconceptions. An example is when the seller of a car declares it has been serviced regularly but does not tell that a fault was reported at the last service. Propaganda is an example of lying by omission.

(xiii) Lying in trade: The seller of a product or service may advertise untrue facts about the product or service in order to gain sales, especially by competitive advantage. Many countries have enacted Consumer protection laws intended to combat such fraud.

(xiv) Lying through your teeth: When one lies face-to-face with the intended recipient. This also may be an expression describing the act of lying with a smile or other patronizing tone or body language.

(xv) Misleading or Dissembling: A misleading statement is one where there is no outright lie, but still retains the purpose of getting someone to believe in an untruth. "Dissembling" likewise describes the presentation of facts in a way that is literally true, but intentionally misleading.

(xvi) Careful speaking: Careful speaking is distinct from the above in that the speaker wishes to avoid imparting certain information, or admitting certain facts, and additionally, does not want to 'lie' when doing so. Careful speaking involves using carefully-phrased statements to give a 'half-answer': one that does not actually 'answer' the question, but still provides an appropriate (and accurate) answer based on that question. As with 'misleading', above, 'careful speaking' is not outright lying.

(xvii) Noble lie: A noble lie is one that would normally cause discord if uncovered, but offers some benefit to the liar and assists in an orderly society, therefore, potentially beneficial to others. It is often told to maintain law, order and safety.

(xviii) Perjury: Perjury is the act of lying or making verifiably false statements on a material matter under oath or affirmation in a court of law, or in any of various sworn statements in writing. Perjury is a crime, because the witness has sworn to tell the truth and, for the credibility of the court to remain intact, witness testimony must be relied on as truthful.

(xix) Puffery: Puffery is an exaggerated claim typically found in advertising and publicity announcements, such as "the highest quality at the lowest price," or "always votes in the best interest of all the people." Such statements are unlikely to be true - but cannot be proven false and so do not violate trade laws, especially as the consumer is expected to be able to tell that it is not the absolute truth.

(xx) Compliments and false reassurances: "That looks very nice on you." White lies or exaggerations intended to please the other person. "Everything is going to be alright".

(xxi) White lie: A white lie would cause only relatively minor discord if it were uncovered, and typically offers some benefit to the hearer. White lies are often used to avoid offense, such as complimenting something one finds unattractive. In this case, the lie is told to avoid the harmful realistic implications of the truth. As a concept, it is largely defined by the custom and context, and cannot be clearly separated from other lies with any authority.

5. Are women more prone to telling lies: There are sayings indicating that women are more capable of, as well as indulgent in, telling lies. In the *Mahābhārata* (*Anushāsan Parva*: 49) it is said that women make a lie appear as truth, and a truth appear as a lie. (see <http://www.hinduism.co.za/women.htm>). In the *Rāma Charita Mānasa* (*Lankā Kānda*), the author, Tulsidas, writes: “*Nāri subhau satya saba kahahēn, Abaguna ātha sadā ura rahahēn | Sāhasa, anrita, chapalatā māyā, Bhaya abibeka asoucha adāyā*” meaning that women naturally have in their core eight vices: rashness, lying, fickle-mindedness, deceit, fear, lack of wisdom, impurity and unkindness. Of course, one may argue that since this statement reflects the views of Rāvana (an evil-doer, villain), it might not be the view of the society in general. However, in his *Nīti* (*Chānakya Nīti*) Kautilya verily states: “*Anritam sāhasam māyā mōrkhatvam atilōbhītā; Ashauchatvam nirdayatvam strīnam dōshāh swabhāvajāh*” meaning that lying, rashness, deceit, lack of wisdom, greediness, impurity and unkindness are the seven vices naturally present among the women. Therefore, Chānakya in his *Sōtra* suggests that “*Strīshu kinchidapi na vishwaset*” or one should never trust the women even slightly (*Arthashāstra: Chānakya Sōtra*: 359) and “*Strīnam sarbāshubham*” or in women everything is wrong and evil (*Arthashāstra: Chānakya Sōtra*: 476). “Frailty, thy name is woman!” in *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare epitomizes a similar social belief prevailing in the West. It may be argued that such a characterization of women is partly because in a male dominated society women developed these traits for their survival. It is also believed that women cannot keep anything secret with them. In the *Mahābhārata* (*Shānti Parva*, 7-11), Yudhishtira cursed the womankind making them incapable of keeping anything secret with them.

However, researchers at the Science Museum in London, which commissioned a research study, came to the conclusion that far from being damaging, small lies can oil the wheels of human interaction. The study has concluded that men tell many more lies than women. On average, a man will tell three lies a day, racking up 1,092 whoppers in a year. On the other hand the average woman will come out with 728 fibbing, just twice a day (reported by Dixon, 2010). It is not unlikely that the observed difference in this study is due to different types of roles that the respondent men and women had to play in their professional lives. The professional roles of men might have been more lie-demanding.

The study conducted by Feldman et al. (2002) examined the effects of self-presentation goals on the amount and type of verbal deception used by participants in same-gender and mixed-gender dyads. The study found that lies told by men and women differed in content, although not in quantity. Therefore, it is more likely that there is no difference between women and men with regard to proneness to telling lies. Machiavelli (in *The Prince*, Ch. 17) appears to consider men, in general, opportunistic and thus “[It] is to be asserted in general of men, that they are ungrateful, fickle, false, cowardly, covetous, and as long as you succeed they are yours entirely; they will offer you their blood, property, life, and children, as is said above, when the need is far distant; but when it approaches they turn against you.”

6. Morality of lying: The philosophers St. Augustine, as well as St. Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant condemned all lying. However, Thomas Aquinas also had an argument for lying. According to all three, there are no circumstances in which one may lie. One must be murdered, suffer torture, or endure any other hardship, rather than lie, even if the *only* way to protect oneself is to lie. Each of these philosophers gave several arguments against lying, all compatible with each other. Among the more important arguments are: Lying is a perversion of the natural faculty of speech, the natural end of which is to communicate the thoughts of the speaker and when one lies, one undermines trust in society.

It is alleged that some belief systems may find lying to be justified. Lying is morally blameworthy in a relatively un-obscure way. Although there may be cases of lying to which it may be difficult to take up a definite moral attitude (Miri, 1974). Leo Tolstoy is cited (Thomas, 1987) as describing religious institutions as the product of deception and lies for a good purpose. Forsberg (2008) is of the opinion that lying for a good cause is not immoral. Barnes (1994) concludes that although there are, in all societies, good pragmatic reasons for not lying all the time, there are also strong reasons for lying some of the time.

"... everyone should recognize the ubiquity of lying, its inevitability, and its beneficial as well as its detrimental attributes. . ." (Barnes, 1994, p. 167). Nietzsche (1968) held that lies were a necessity in order to go on living and to overcome the harshness of reality (Barnes, 1994, p. 140) and in his "*Human, All Too Human*" proclaimed that those who refrain from lying may do so only because of the difficulty involved in maintaining the lie and thus some people tell the truth only out of weakness. Malpas is chagrined to observe the frequent use of deception, deceit and lies in the public life in the contemporary world but holds that "deception is not something that can ever be removed from human affairs. But deception can only be recognized as deception where we retain a sense of truth. Moreover, where we lose that sense of truth, or a commitment to it, then we lose our engagement with ourselves, others, and the world, and we lose, not only our sense of ethics, but we lose a sense of ourselves, of others, of the world. Deception becomes not merely self-deception, but self-destruction." (Malpas, 2008; p. 10).

Since a lie is theologically defined as "to deny others access to knowledge to which they are entitled", keeping silence as a deliberate action in the face of an inquiry, while one knows something to be false/true or that one does not honestly believe to be true/false, may be considered as an act of lying, although non-verbally. When Kautilya teaches: *Dāreshu kinchit swajaneshu kinchit gōpyam vayeshyeshu suteshu kinchit* – meaning that there are certain sorts of information that should be held back or kept secret from wife, women, kiths, peers, elderly persons and sons (and daughters) – he means that one should not speak or blurt out all truth that one knows. The dictum of Manu in his *Manu Smriti*, the book on which Nietzsche (1888: 56) opined that "the sun shines upon the whole Book" states: "*Satyam brōyat priyam brōyat na brōyat satyamapriyam; Priyam cha nānritam brōyat esha dharmah sanātanaḥ*" (Manu Smriti, IV-138) – meaning "let him say what is true, let him say what is pleasing, let him utter no disagreeable truth, and let him utter no agreeable falsehood; that is the eternal law" (Bühler, 1886), possibly suggesting to keep silence if a truth to be told is unpalatable – has the same moral content. Further, there are a number of instances in the Mahābhārata that suggest telling a lie for a greater social cause or keeping up the '*dharmā*'. DePaulo et al. (1996) hold that the portrayal of everyday lies as disruptive of social life and harmful to others is in need of modification, because so many of these lies are told to avoid tension and conflict and to minimize hurt feelings and ill will.

This attitude to truth and lie is basically pragmatic in nature. The pragmatic philosophy propounded by Charles Peirce, William James, John Dewey, George Santayana and others, judges desirability or virtue by its effects, which are beneficial to the individual/society. The epistemology of pragmatism has been heavily influenced by Charles Darwin. However, pragmatism was not the first to apply evolution to theories of knowledge. Schopenhauer advocated a *biological idealism* as what's useful to an organism to believe might differ wildly from what is true. Here knowledge and action are portrayed as two separate spheres with an absolute or transcendental truth above and beyond any sort of inquiry organisms use to cope with life. Pragmatism challenges this idealism by providing an "ecological" account of knowledge: inquiry is how organisms can get a grip on their environment. In this milieu, the '*will to believe*' of William James (1896), might be viewed as a Jungian archetype in the collective unconscious obtained through the experiences and the most expedient thumb-rules formulated over the generations in the past. Will to believe is also justified on the ground that doubt, inquiry and factual determination of the truth or the falsehood might be prohibitively costly in terms of time and effort. On the other hand, Gita (Ch.4, verse 39) proclaims – *shraddhāvān labhate jñānam* – that '*shraddhā*' - trust or belief - is primordial to '*jñāna*' or knowledge or knowledge cannot be obtained without trust. Indeed all non-experiential knowledge flow from the axiomatic system that must first be relied upon or trusted. Consequentially, the beneficial lies also are pragmatically acceptable. In the *Mahābhārata (Drōna Parva, Ch. 190)*, while Yudhishira was quite unwilling to tell a lie that had a decisive value to get Drōna killed in the battle, Krishna, the God Incarnate, pragmatically opined: "*Satyājyāyōanritam vachah; Anritam jīvitasārthe vadanna sprishyateanritaih*" meaning that in the prevailing circumstances, the value of a lie is more than the truth; if telling a lie is needed to save one's life, the liar is free from the sin of telling a lie". This is in contrast to the view of St. Aquinas, who proscribes *telling a lie* even if the *only way to protect one's life* is

to lie. Even the utilitarian philosophy would appreciate the desirability of truth or lie on the basis of the individual/social utility that it has. Soothsayers have psychological utility. Medical doctors use placebo for comforting the patients, in spite of the criticism of the practice that it is unethical to prescribe treatments that don't work, and that telling a patient that a placebo is a real medication is deceptive and harms the doctor-patient relationship in the long run. Critics of placebo treatment also argue that using placebos can delay the proper diagnosis and treatment of serious medical conditions. Psychiatrists use 'suggestions' for treating their patients, which may often be the lies. Thus, at least in practice, the Kantian ethics of the categorical imperative is "unsound because the premise that claims to provide strong support for the conclusion that 'lying is morally wrong' is not necessarily true. ... Applying the ethical issue of truth telling to a specific medical condition narrows the boundaries within which a methodical argument can be made. More importantly, it illustrates that biomedical ethics is subject to situational variables that are difficult to incorporate into a generalized directive for physicians." (Natarajan, 1996). Thus a life-saving or curative lie is considered more recommendable than the truth that might have devastating practical consequences.

Nietzsche (1873) rejects the very concept of the (social) truth and thereby renders the moral conception of lying altogether baseless. To quote him: "What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms – in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins."

Ec (1970, p. 69) goes to the extent of holding the view that "a society in which all truths were bluntly exposed would be more like a hell than a paradise". This extreme view is akin to the doctrine that a minimum level of corruption is a necessary ingredient to keep the society composed, running and stable (Laffont and Tirole, 1991; 1993).

7. Consequences of objectionable lying if detected: Once a lie has been told there can be two alternative consequences: it may be discovered or remain undiscovered. Under some circumstances, discovery of a lie may discredit other statements by the same speaker and can lead to social or legal sanctions against the speaker, such as ostracizing or conviction for perjury. When a lie is discovered, the state of mind and behaviour of the lie teller (liar) is no longer predictable. The discoverer of a lie may also be convinced or coerced to collaborate with the liar, becoming part of a conspiracy. They may actively propagate the lie to other parties, actively prevent the lie's discovery by other parties, or simply omit publicizing the lie (a secondary lie of omission).

8. The Economics of Lying: Lying is a subject matter of the Economics of Information, a branch of economics that studies how information affects an economy and economic decisions. Information as a good has special characteristics. Buying and selling information is not the same as buying and selling most other goods. First of all, information is non-rivalrous, which means that consuming information does not exclude someone else from also consuming it. A related characteristic that alters information markets is that information has almost zero marginal cost. This means that once the first copy exists, it cost nothing or almost nothing to make a second copy. This makes it easy to sell over and over. However, it makes classic marginal cost pricing completely infeasible. Second, exclusion is not a natural property of information goods, though it is possible to construct exclusion artificially. However, the nature of information is that if it is known, it is difficult to exclude others from its use. Third is that the information market does not exhibit high degrees of transparency. That is, to evaluate the information the information must be known, one has to invest in learning it to evaluate it. Information has economic value because it

allows individuals to make choices that yield higher expected payoffs or expected utility than they would obtain from choices made in the absence of information.

When two (or more) parties engage in some sort of transaction, it is not necessary that all the parties have the same (quality and quantity of) relevant information with them. This situation creates information imbalance among the transacting parties. This situation is known as *information asymmetry*. In most of the cases, information asymmetry cannot be avoided due to a high *transaction cost* of obtaining information. Information asymmetry may lead to biased selection, in which certain types of ‘deal’ are more likely to materialize than the other types of ‘deal’. It may also involve moral hazards. Moral hazard arises because an individual or institution does not take the full consequences and responsibilities of its doings, and therefore has a tendency to act less carefully than it alternately would, leaving another party to hold some responsibility for the consequences of those actions. Both of these consequences are the fall out of a suboptimal solution, which could not have materialized if the information asymmetry would not have been there. Thus, information asymmetry blocks the optimal solution. It has, therefore, the consequences that characterize suboptimal allocation of resources and its implications with regard to social welfare.

It is pertinent to bring in some game-theoretic notions here. The process of transaction proceeds as a sequence of strategic moves made by the players or the parties involved in the act of transaction, finally culminating into the ‘deal’. Such games of transaction might be a *garbage game* (negative sum game), a *zero-sum game* or a *cooperative game* (positive sum game). The optimal solution of a negative sum game is that after the game is over, both (all) parties are worse off or at least one of the parties is worse off without making others better (in comparison to the state at which the game started). Overall, the value of the game is negative. A positive sum game culminates into a state in which all parties are better off or at least one of the parties is better off without making others worse off (in comparison to the state at which the game started). Overall, the value of the game is positive. In a zero-sum game some are losers and some others are gainers such that the sum of benefits and losses is zero. In this perspective, a suboptimal solution of a garbage game is socially preferable (or superior) to the optimal solution. In contrast, a suboptimal solution of a cooperative game is socially inferior (deferrable) to the optimal solution. Nothing can be said of the optimal or suboptimal solution of a zero-sum game unless some value judgment is invoked.

When a game is played by many (more than two) players/parties, there are ample chances of coalition among some players against the others who are out of the coalition. Formation of coalition can significantly affect the value of a game. Strategies can be devised to block the formation of such coalitions.

A lie being a type of deception in the form of an untruthful statement, especially with the intention to deceive others, is the *sine qua non* of information asymmetry. The rest of its consequences follow. However, if a lie leads to blocking of the optimal solution of a negative sum game (and thus forces a suboptimal solution to prevail), it is socially desirable. On the other hand, if a lie leads to blocking of the optimal solution of a positive sum game (and thus forces a suboptimal solution to prevail), it is socially undesirable. Lies can block the formation of certain types of coalition among the players/parties, and depending on the possible consequences of the coalitions, appropriate lies may add to or reduce the value of a game. This game-theoretic and information-asymmetry based analysis of lying may be carried out in the manner of analysis of corruption by Laffont and Tirole (1991/1993).

Emergency lies, noble lies, white lies and compliments and false reassurances are the typical lies that block the optimal solution of a possibly garbage game, thus increasing the value of the game. William (2009) observes that the big lie (if not the noble lie) remains a working tool of statecraft even in the more democratic contemporary states. Grant (1997) has opined: “we do not really expect that our leaders will

never tell a lie, and I doubt that we would be simply proud if they were scrupulously honest when it cost us something.” However, other types of lie may block the optimal solution of a possibly cooperative game, thus decreasing the value of the game. Lies seldom give rise to a zero-sum game solution.

Whatever might be the social value of lying, the individual who tells a lie with an objective to gain some advantage often perceives some net benefit from telling the lies. As a matter of chance, a lie may get caught and the person may suffer a loss. Telling lies has also some social stigma attached with it and a liar may also incur some moral pain. Telling lies may have some opportunity cost as well. A person’s net benefit from lying is the gross benefit from lying less the opportunity costs, the perceived chance of being caught and the penalty on that, and the perceived value of social stigma and the moral pain. A person might tell a lie if the net benefit exceeds zero. In the situation when the truth is unobserved or the detection of the lie is more or less unlikely or very costly for others to know the truth or the discovery of the truth would not hurt the liar, the net benefit from lying is significant. Hu and Lewbel (2007) found that in the job market the ‘returns to lying’ is positive. Glazer and Hassin (1983) analyze how the taxicab drivers cheat their customers unfamiliar to the city of their visits, since such passengers are the visitors who will seldom encounter the same driver more than once or the visitors leave the city making the prospect of repeated patronage a remote possibility.

9. Concluding Remarks: A lie is an expression at deviance with the truth known or honestly believed by someone with an intention to deceive others for certain purpose, social or personal. An ability to lie might be evolutionary in nature possibly to help in survival, since it is found in the non-human world also. In the biological perspective, each individual is at war against all others. Thus viewed, lies are the cardinal virtues for survival and, by implication, the carriers of evolution. In the human world, lying is morally blameworthy in a relatively un-obscure way. There may be cases of lying to which it may be difficult to take up a definite moral attitude. Certain types of lies might be morally acceptable and socially beneficial, while other types of lies are ethically and socially deplorable. This must be judged pragmatically with the overall social welfare that they entail or produce.

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