

Lying, Liars and Language

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They boast that they do not tell lies: but inability to lie is far from being love of truth. Be on your guard!

Freedom from fever is far from being knowledge! I do not believe frozen spirits. He who cannot lie does not know what truth is.

— Nietzsche's Zarathustra

Abstract

This paper considers the phenomenon of lying and the implications it has for those subjects who are capable of lying. It is argued that lying is not just intentional untruthfulness, but is intentional untruthfulness plus an insincere invocation of trust. Understood in this way, lying demands of liars a sophistication in relation to themselves, to language, and to those to whom they lie which exceeds the demands on mere truth-tellers.

1. Introduction

Lying is a form of behaviour which receives relatively little attention as a feature of linguistic interaction (other than as a moral aberration). We occasionally find suggestions that the ability to lie reflects significant capacities of linguistic and communicative subjects, but there has been little or no attempt to draw out or

clarify this supposed significance. In this paper I hope to give the beginnings of such an explication. I shall begin by offering an analysis of the concept of lying, and then highlight sets of assumptions and capacities which must be present in a liar, and which must be features of linguistic subjects that are capable of lying.

2. Lying

An account of lying can begin from the notion that it is a species of deception. But in as much as this is correct we need to reconstrue it as a species of intentional deception. As a broad definition we can say that deception *simpliciter* occurs when some organism believes it is in situation A, whereas in fact it is in situation B, and this belief or action may arise at least partly due to the action of some other organism. This encompasses someone being in error due to my having said something false, for example; but in that I have not necessarily lied. In lying the other's error is something I intend.

So we can say that lying is a species of intentional deception. However, here we do not quite modify the original definition. We began by defining 'deception' in terms of the error of some organism—the 'deceived'—and allowed an acting 'deceiver' as one possible cause of that error; but as soon as we talk of 'intentional deception' we focus on the action of the deceiver. Intentional deception occurs when a deceiver acts with the intention that some deceived be in error at least partly due to that action (which may be construed as inaction in deception by omission). We retain a partial focus on the deceived, since intentional deception succeeds when the deceived is in error at least partly due to the action or inaction of the deceiver.¹ But the error now is no longer simply error 'in fact,' but error from the point of view of the deceiver. That is, I might successfully deceive you into believing that the earth is flat. It might, however, turn out that you are not deceived in the original sense—

¹ A possible alternative to this distinction (which I shall not develop in the present paper) would be to say that deception is intentional deception as defined, and that 'deception' in the original broad sense depends on an effaced metaphor arising from notions such as 'deception by the senses'. Thus, talk of deception due to factors other than intending actors could be seen as originating from anthropocentric projection, and as derivative of talk of intentional deception.

that you are not ‘in fact’ in error—but given that I believe the earth to be roughly spherical, and given that your subsequent belief is sufficiently due to my action, then I can be said to have engaged and succeeded in a project of intentional deception.²

We can add that it seems to be a necessary condition for the success of a project of intentional deception that the deceiver’s intention and view of the fact of the matter remain hidden from the deceived. I shall return to this later.

So far, so good. The next obvious step is to say that lying is intentional deception by verbal means. But while to lie may be to act with the intent to deceive, it is not necessarily to deceive—at least in a straightforward sense. For we may not believe the lies we are told, but we are nonetheless told lies. So we need to focus more closely on that with regard to which deception is intended.

We can intend to deceive someone with regard to any number of things: the weather, the time, our affection, and so on. We intend that they be in error. We can call this the primary deceptive intention, and take it as common to all intentional deception. In lying, however, there is at least one prior level of deceptive intention. We have the intention that someone be in error regarding some matter, as we see the fact of the matter (and this matter can include our own beliefs, desires, and so on); but we aim to bring this about through their prior error regarding our belief regarding that matter—and this prior error is intended to be at least partly responsible for the secondary error. We don’t lie *about* this belief, but we intend to deceive *regarding* it.

We could say that in a lie we act to deceive someone regarding our belief in some proposition, and that we have the primary intention that they be deceived regarding that proposition at least partly on the basis of their deception regarding

² On lying as a species of deception, see, for example, Vasek (1986, p.271) and Betz (1985, p.221). On the relation between deception and intentional deception, see Russow (1986) and van Horne (1981). Some cases of non-intentional deception would fall under van Horne’s category of ‘misleading’—cases where someone is in error at least partly due to the action of someone who did not intend to bring about the error. However, van Horne’s distinction between misleading, deception and lying is not necessary for the present discussion. See van Horne (1981, pp.175-6).

our belief—that is, on the basis of the success of our secondary deceptive intention. This appears to give us an account of lying as intentional untruthfulness.

If we accept that to assert is to express or state or represent some proposition with the intention that our audience should come to think both that we believe that proposition and that we intend our audience to come to believe the proposition at least partly on the basis of their recognition of our belief, and if we say that in lying the assertor's requisite belief is missing, then we might also say that lying is insincere assertion.

But if we understand assertion in this way we miss the central feature of lying. In lying we do all that is contained in the account above, but we do it *to* someone. We present our belief to the one to whom we lie, and we present it openly, in the sense that we intend to give them reason to think, through features of context and manner, that we intend them to recognize the presentation of belief. By this, I think, we present ourselves as believing something while and through invoking (although not necessarily gaining) the trust of the one we intend to deceive.

The invocation of trust occurs through an act of 'open sincerity,' by which I mean that we attempt to establish a mutually acknowledged recognition, by the one to whom we lie, both that we believe some proposition and that we intend them to realise that we believe it.

In lying we are insincere in that we falsely present ourselves as believing something, but we are doubly insincere because, by openly presenting ourselves to someone as intending them to recognize our presentation of belief, we engage that person's recognition of our sincerity. The liar is doubly insincere in that he or she insincerely presents a belief and insincerely invokes trust in this presentation. So in lying the liar intends to deceive the liee regarding some matter, and intends to satisfy that first intention (at least partly) by deceiving the liee regarding the liar's belief regarding that matter. In lying, however, there is a third level of deceptive intention. For the liar intends to satisfy the secondary intention (at least partly) by establishing the mutual recognition of the sincerity of that belief, and in that being insincere.

The reason for this third level of deceptive intention is that we seem to need to be able to distinguish lying from those cases where someone simply acts as if he or she believes some proposition. Consider the following example: Three people (Alice, Bruce, and Clive) speak the same language. Alice and Bruce conspire and, knowing that Clive can overhear, Alice says to Bruce that there are no police on the road.³ They both believe that there are police on the road, and intend Clive to come to believe that there are not, at least partly through his belief that Alice believes that there are not—so we have both primary and secondary deceptive intention.

On my account, and also on Chisholm and Feehan's, this is not a lie. On my account it is not a lie because, on the one hand, the speaker, Alice, has not acted with the intention of deceiving Bruce regarding her beliefs, so has not lied to Bruce; and on the other hand, and more significantly, Alice has not acted to deceive Clive regarding her beliefs by acting to invoke Clive's trust in the presentation of her belief, so she has not lied to Clive. That is, Alice has not acted with, and has not acted on, the intention that the overhearer, Clive, think that Alice intends Clive to think that Alice believes that there are no police on the road. Clive is intended to be deceived regarding Alice's beliefs, but not by way of a trust invoked through an open sincerity. Clive may mistakenly think that Alice is sincere, but is given no reason to think that Alice intends Clive to think that Alice is sincere, and so Alice is not insincere at this higher level.

This, I think, picks out lying as a species of acting with the intent to deceive. In this making open our sincerity we lie *to* someone, we don't just act with the intention that they be deceived, or say that which is false. I think that this third level in lying reflects the intuition that lying is morally interesting because it involves a certain sort of betrayal, and that this betrayal is of something invoked, and not just intended. I shall return to this point.

In this sort of account we might say that a lie has three degrees of success. It is fully successful if a speaker deceives someone regarding that about which he or she lies. I assert to you that it is raining (believing that it is not), and you come to believe

³ See Chisholm and Feehan (1977, p.156).

that it is, at least partly because of what I have done. It is also successful, as a lie, if the hearer is deceived regarding the speaker's sincerity (even if this does not at least partially cause them to come to believe the proposition asserted). I assert to you that it is raining (believing that it is not), but though you think me sincere you think me mistaken. A lie is *performed*, however, and so succeeds as an act, if there is just mutual manifestation of the speaker's apparent sincerity; that is, if there is uptake regarding the invocation of trust. I assert to you that it is raining (believing that it is not), but though you recognize that I intend you to take me as presenting my belief to you sincerely, you don't believe that I am sincere. On my account, if there is no uptake regarding the speaker's apparent sincerity a lie is merely intended.

Finally, lying is something that is necessarily done to a subject or subjects other than ourselves, or at least, to a consciousness other than our own. The project of lying involves the deceptive intention outlined above, but also shares with intentional deception the equally necessary intent to hide the deceptive intentions. Without this disguise the lie could not succeed, and without the intention that there be this disguise there would be no lie. For Davidson (1985, pp.87-88), for example, this feature of lying is why self-deception is not lying to oneself, and similarly this is why for Sartre bad faith is not lying to oneself. As Sartre puts it, 'if I deliberately and cynically attempt to lie to myself, I fail completely in this undertaking; the lie falls back and collapses beneath my look; it is ruined *from behind* by the very consciousness of lying to myself ...' (1943, pp.49-50).

We can accommodate the third level of deceptive intention to an account that makes use of assertion in one of two ways. We can say that in lying there is assertion plus the invocation of trust, or we can say that assertion itself involves this invocation of trust. Adopting the second option we come close to the definition offered by Chisholm and Feehan, which has become a standard account of lying:

L lies to D =_{df} There is a proposition *p* such that (i) either L believes that *p* is not true or L believes that *p* is false and (ii) L asserts *p* to D.⁴

L asserts *p* to D =_{df} L states *p* to D and does so under conditions which, L believes, justify D in believing that L not only accepts *p*, but also intends to contribute causally to D's believing that *p*. (Chisholm and Feehan 1977, p.152)

Chisholm and Feehan's account has a different emphasis, and it does not, for example, use the notion of levels of deceptive intent, but I believe that it is compatible with mine up to this point.

Now consider Davidson's account of lying in 'Deception and Division':

While the liar may intend his hearer to believe what he says, this intention is not essential to the concept of lying; a liar who believes that his hearer is perverse may say the opposite of what he intends his hearer to believe. A liar may not even intend to make his victim believe that he, the liar, believes what he says. The only intentions a liar must have, I think, are these: (1) he must intend to represent himself as believing what he does not (for example, and typically, by asserting what he does not believe), and (2) he must intend to keep this intention (though not necessarily what he actually believes) hidden from his hearer. So deceit of a very special kind is involved in lying, deceit with respect to the sincerity of the representation of one's beliefs. (Davidson 1985, p.88)

Obviously I am sympathetic to Davidson's idea that the crucial deceit involved in lying is deceit with respect to the sincerity of the representation of one's beliefs. This more or less captures the sense in which it is correct to say that lying is a species of (intended) deception. However, one qualification that Davidson allows

⁴ Chisholm and Feehan distinguish believing that *p* is not true and believing that *p* is false because they want to maintain a distinction between the concept of a proposition being not true and that of a proposition being false (1977, p.146). They use 'accepts *p*' as a variant of 'believes that *p*' (1977, p.146).

suggests that he does not consistently recognize the significance of this deceitful sincerity.

The difficulty in Davidson's account lies in resolving the apparent conflict between on the one hand the condition that a liar intend to represent himself as believing what he does not, and intend to keep this intention hidden, and on the other hand the qualifications that a liar may say the opposite of what he intends his hearer to believe, may not intend to make his victim believe that he believes what he says, and may not intend to keep what he actually believes hidden from his hearer. I am willing to accept the first two qualifications, but not the third.

Two examples from Augustine (*On Lying*, pp.385-6) help make the issue clearer. In the first, a man knows that there are bandits on a certain road and fears that his friend may take that road. The man knows that his friend does not trust him, and so says that there are not bandits on the road, hoping that his friend will come to believe that there are. For Chisholm and Feehan (1977, pp.153-4) the man has not lied. He has acted with the intention of deceiving his friend, but he has not lied because he has not asserted anything. He has not asserted anything because he has not stated that there are not bandits on the road under conditions which he believes justify his friend in believing that he, the speaker, accepts that there are not bandits on the road. I agree with them, and for similar reasons—for the speaker has not acted on the intention to invoke trust in his presentation of himself as believing. He says that there are no bandits, but presents himself as believing that there are bandits, and does this by *pretending* to intend to invoke trust in what he says.

The speaker here does not intend his friend to believe what he says, and indeed he says the opposite of what he intends his friend to believe; nor does he intend his friend to believe that he believes what he says, or intend to keep his own beliefs regarding the bandits hidden. So this case covers all Davidson's qualifications, but it is not lying on Davidson's account. The speaker does not intend to represent himself as believing what he does not—rather, he intends to represent himself *as intending to represent himself* as believing what he does not. That is, he does not intend to keep the initial intention hidden from his friend. His deception relies on

that (pretended) intention, but not the pretence, being recognized. So this case does not resolve the apparent conflict in Davidson's account.

In the second example we have the same situation, but here the man tells his friend that there *are* bandits on the road, hoping that his friend will think that he believes that there are not. For Chisholm and Feehan (1977, p.154) this again is not a lie. The speaker acts with deceptive intent, but does not assert a proposition he believes to be false—he is a fiend, but not a liar.

This case does, however, meet Davidson's necessary conditions for a lie. The man intends to represent himself as believing that there are no bandits on the road, and he intends to keep this intention hidden. He also says the opposite of what he intends his hearer to believe, and does not intend the hearer to believe that he believes what he says.

I think that this is not a lie, because again the speaker presents himself as believing something (this time that there are not bandits on the road), but does not intend to invoke trust regarding this presentation. I think that Davidson is wrong because in a lie one must pretend sincerity, but also act on an intention that this sincerity be accepted—otherwise one is pretending to lie, and not lying. But the further problem for Davidson is that even if we accept this as lying, in order to satisfy the lying intentions the man must keep what he actually believes hidden from his hearer, so Davidson's third qualification is ruled out here.

The qualification, that one may not intend to keep one's beliefs hidden, seems difficult to justify. If this is taken as saying that one may not intend to keep what one actually believes hidden *as* what one actually believes, then, on the face of it, it seems to undermine the liar's project. If I believe that *p*, but intend to represent myself as believing that *not-p*, then if I do not keep my belief that *p* hidden my representation will not be very successful. If I do not intend to keep this actual belief hidden, then I cannot intend to represent myself as believing what I do not, and cannot intend to lie.

The problem seems to arise from ambiguity in 'represent'. If I *describe* myself as believing that *p*, intending my hearer to think that I believe that *p*, but in fact

believing that *not-p*, then I must intend to keep my actual belief hidden. I must intend my hearer to think that I am sincere in so describing myself, and if I am actually lying I also intend my hearer to recognize the intention to be seen by the hearer as sincere. Alternatively, if I describe myself as believing that *p*, and believe that *p*, but, relying on context, *present* myself as both believing that *not-p* and intending my hearer to think that I believe that *not-p*, then, if I am lying, I must still keep my actual belief (that *not-p*) hidden.

Davidson seems to miss the difference between describing oneself as believing something and presenting oneself as believing something. If I describe myself as believing something, then, for a lie to occur, I must *present* myself to the liee as believing or being committed to this description—and as sincerely so presenting myself. Davidson points out the significance of deceitful sincerity in lying, but then leaves it aside.

We therefore need to add to the earlier account the condition that the liar intend to keep both his or her deceptive intentions and actual beliefs hidden from the one lied to.

As I have said, I do accept Davidson's first two qualifications. Assume that the speaker in Augustine's situation thinks that his friend trusts him, and says *ironically*, and *as ironically*, that there are bandits on the road. Through this presentation of himself as insincerely asserting he presents himself as believing that there are not bandits on the road. He presents himself as not committed to what he says, and is insincere in this. If we accept that the speaker here does invoke trust, then this is a lie (an indirect lie, we might say). In that case, Davidson's first two qualifications are justified. The speaker does not intend his friend to believe what he says, and does not intend his friend to believe that he, the speaker, believes what he says. He does, however, intend to keep what he actually believes hidden.

In Chisholm and Feehan's account, lying involves assertion, and intuitively this seems to be a primary characteristic of lying. But if examples such as the ironic case are accepted as lying, then we need to allow the possibility of indirect assertion (or

in-effect assertion), where the proposition regarding which deception is intended is asserted in effect, although not in fact. If the crucial feature of lying is the open manifestation of one's belief and sincerity, then it may be that the means by which one indicates that to which one is committed can be something other than straightout stating. The belief is not mentioned in the lie, but it is in the foreground of lying. It is this open display of sincere commitment that marks lying as morally interesting. What is peculiarly interesting about lying is not that I say that which is false, nor that I act with the intent to deceive, but that I am falsely openly sincere.

Also, while it is true that language is present and used in almost all lying, we don't exactly need language each time we lie. What we need is the capacity for making our beliefs public and our sincerity in this mutually manifest. Language is handy for this, but (probably derivatively) nods, winks and shoulder shrugs may suffice. While non-linguistic means are perhaps more open to misunderstanding, they are also more readily defeasible.⁵

So in lying we directly or indirectly represent some state of affairs, present ourselves as believing that representation to be true, and act on the intention that the one or ones to whom we lie have reason to think that we intend them to take this as a sincere presentation of our belief—but we lack the requisite belief. We also intend the one or ones to whom we lie to come to believe the representation to be true.

My account of lying may raise objections at two points. First, 'lie' sometimes appears to be applied to cases in which there could be no question of invocation or betrayal of trust. In war or politics, for example, there could be situations in which one might be said to lie to one's enemies or opponents, but in which there is no mutuality and in which considerations of sincerity would be pointless. It may also be possible to find such cases from court rooms. I think that we do speak of lies in such cases, but that it is a distinct application of the term, rather than an

⁵ The ironic example suggests that the explicitness of the manifestation of one's commitment to that regarding which one lies will vary according to the use of non-linguistic indication and indirect speech acts. Here the question is not one of subjective involvement in the lie, but the public defeasibility of the lie.

application that questions the strength of my account. By that I mean that I have attempted to pick out lying as a species of intentional deception, whereas these 'lies' do not involve intentional deception at all—at least, of the one to whom we 'lie'. If in war I make a statement to my enemies I may hope to disinform them, but I cannot hope to deceive them regarding my statement.⁶ The very situation that makes trust impossible makes direct deception—deception regarding that which one represents oneself as believing—impossible. So this use of 'lie' just applies to the intentional utterance of an untruth, and need involve no deceptive intentions. The use of 'lie' on which I am concentrating here applies primarily to deception.

Second, I have introduced a qualification that allows for the possibility of lying ironically, and I have made the associated suggestion that the use of language may not be necessary in order to lie in each case. This may seem to weaken the distinction between lying and other cases of deception, especially non-verbal deception. In a sense this is true, but the force of the present account of lying has been to draw attention to the nature of the deception involved, rather than the medium by which deception is achieved.

Lying is primarily a verbal or written matter. But this is because the satisfaction of the deceptive intentions involved in lying rests on assertion, and assertion is typically a verbal matter. So if it is possible to assert in effect (with an ironic lie), or if it is possible non-verbally to present oneself to the other as believing some state of affairs to be the case, intending this to be at least partial reason for the other to come to share the belief, and so on, then it is possible to lie without direct verbal assertion.

All that is necessary for lying is that the liar present himself or herself as believing something, and as being sincere in this presentation. How the initial presentation is achieved is not crucial. The importance of language arises because lying indirectly or non-verbally seems to be parasitic on direct verbal assertion, and because the

⁶ Often in such cases what is said is said for the benefit of onlookers rather than interlocutors. The intention is to deceive one's allies or supporters. This might be something like the earlier case of Alice deceiving Clive (but not lying to him) by uttering a falsehood to Bruce.

interactive complexity involved in lying may be tied to the complexity of linguistic community. I shall have more to say about these matters in the next section.

In this discussion I have treated lying as a relatively pure phenomenon. However, a liar rarely achieves this purity. There is rarely the transparency between a liar and his or her beliefs assumed here. We can be variously aware of our self-deception and can be in bad faith, for example. This means that we will not always be aware or fully aware of ourselves as liars, and may move in and out of a consciousness of ourselves as liars. We may sometimes realise in retrospect that we have lied, that we did not really believe what we said; or in asserting something we may have varying degrees of doubt regarding the certainty of our belief.⁷

It seems, therefore, that there are degrees of lying depending on the degree of commitment or engagement in what we say and the degree of commitment we display. Notice that I do not focus on the reasons for or the situation of lying as marking shades of lying. These factors relate to the evaluation of the liar given the lie—and do not interest me here. My qualification relates to the shading that reflects the engagement of the lying subject in the lie, and concerns our evaluation of the liar as a liar.

3. Liars

I have argued that lying involves three levels of intended deception. It involves intended deception regarding some state of affairs we represent, regarding our belief in that representation, and regarding the sincerity of our presentation of ourselves as believing. Another way of putting this is to say that lying involves untruthfulness, but that to be untruthful is not necessarily to lie, since lying involves being untruthful while invoking the trust of the one to whom we lie in what we say. Given this account, someone who can lie has a sophistication beyond that of a mere truth-teller. This sophistication comes out as an interaction of reflectiveness, self-control, and a recognition of the other.

⁷ Compare Bok (1978, p.15).

The reflectiveness and self-control of the liar appear first as a relation to language and belief. If we assume that non-linguistic lying (if it is possible) is dependent on language, then the capacity to lie requires the capacity to use language, and it requires an understanding of language and communicative skills as potential tools for deception. That is, we must have a second-order, reflective relation to language, which includes the capacity to separate signifier and signified, in as much as we need to take language as something by which we can represent falsely.

There must also be the capacity to assert or assert in-effect. This capacity is not just the capacity to express beliefs, but to express them *as* beliefs; that is, in a context and manner that will give the hearer reason to think they are our beliefs and that we intend our expression to give the hearer reason to adopt them. In lying, as well, we do not just assert, in the sense that we do something that satisfies the conditions for asserting: we assert reflectively, in as much as we use assertion in our attempted deception.

Lying therefore requires the capacity to not express our beliefs and to present ourselves as having other beliefs. It seems, then, that lying requires a second-order relation to our beliefs, control regarding their expression, and the capacity for false or fabricated expression. Bernard Williams (1970), claims that one of the necessary conditions for having a belief is the possibility of making an insincere assertion or, in a slightly different formulation, the possibility of deliberate reticence. He says that this amounts to saying that we need something like the will in order to have belief in a rich sense. There is a potential circularity in Williams' suggestion, and he gives few details to his argument, but perhaps the point would be that control or the capacity to intervene in our mental processes (that is, 'the will'), the capacity for insincerity or reticence regarding our beliefs, and the having of fully-fledged beliefs, are interrelated and interdependent features of the belief-laden subject.

A liar must also make a crucial assumption regarding him or herself. When I lie to you I assume that I am opaque to you, and my lie depends on this being the case. I lie to you by displaying my sincerity and simultaneously hiding my beliefs. I assume that while you will recognise my supposed sincerity, my actual beliefs are opaque to you. The opacity in question is an opacity with regard to an other

consciousness, and it does not arise as an issue without the context of other consciousnesses. It arises, that is, with regard to the sorts of things we lie to. The recognition of this opacity is not, I think, automatic to a subject. For example, it appears to be something that can be lost, given the experience of loss of ego boundaries that characterises some forms of schizophrenia,⁸ and it is not clear that a child, simply on becoming conscious, experiences itself as opaque to other consciousnesses.

Tausk (1919, p.535) has suggested that such recognition arises with the child's first successful lie, but given that the project of lying presupposes the assumption of this opacity, this suggestion is not adequate. A more satisfactory explanation might be that it arises gradually, perhaps in fits and starts, through a process of interactive development. It might partly begin with the registering of instances of non-intentional deception of others and the non-satisfaction of wants (although this registering may in turn presuppose certain developments). The first successful true lie would thus mark the flowering of psychic autonomy associated with the realisation of opacity, as well as developments I shall mention a little later.

Apart from this reflectiveness and control of the liar, the project of lying requires a certain awareness of the other. We don't just lie, we lie *to* someone, and this demands that in lying we take the one to whom we lie as being a certain linguistic, cognitive and moral subject.

A liar assumes the possibility of representing some state of affairs and of presenting him or herself as believing that representation, so normally we would say that the liar assumes that the liar and the one lied to share a language and assumes that they share the concept of assertion.

The liar must also assume that the one to whom he or she lies has the concept of belief and is capable of second-order beliefs. This is because the one lied to is intended to adopt beliefs regarding the liar's beliefs, and adopt beliefs regarding them *as* the liars beliefs. Against a subject without this concept and capacity a

⁸ See, for example, Wing (1978).

project of lying cannot succeed as such a project—although a more general project of deception may well succeed.

Given the project of intentional deception in general, a deceiver must be able to adopt the perspective of the other. When I deceive you I aim to bring about a false belief in you with your perspective in mind, guiding my attempt at deception. In lying, the capacity to adopt the perspective of an other needs to be even more developed. Your perspective arises in relation to the notion of my opacity to you and your beliefs regarding mine. It is not just that I take you to be a certain subject, but that I take you to be an other subject. I take you not only to be like me (perceiving, believing, potentially trusting), but also to be an other mind, a mind opaque to me, hidden from me, with its own intentions and its own view of my intentions and potential insincerity.⁹ We might note that work in child psychology suggests that the ability to adopt the perspective of another and recursive awareness of intention appear to develop in children in stages, and may not be fully in evidence until the age of 10 or 12.¹⁰

I have claimed that lying involves false presentation of belief, plus acting on the intention that the one lied to recognize that the liar intends them to take this as a presentation of belief. I suggested that this adds a third level of insincerity because this acts as the invocation of the hearer's trust, but from what I have said so far it is not clear how this acts as an invocation of trust. There is nothing intrinsically trustworthy about presenting oneself to someone as intending them to recognize

⁹ Compare Sartre: 'The lie ... presupposes my existence, the existence of the Other, my existence for the Other, and the existence of the Other for me. ... By the lie consciousness affirms that it exists by nature as *hidden from the Other*;...' (1943, p.49).

¹⁰ Drawing on a range of studies in child psychology and sociology (see particularly the work of Selman [1980, esp. Ch.3]), Vasek (1986) suggests that until roughly 5 years of age children are able to make little or no use of deceptive strategies, and that it is only after about 9 years that they begin to use sophisticated deceptive strategies or intentional communication of false statements and show explicit recognition of others as possible deceptive agents (1986, pp.276-81 & 285). Vasek says that while 'lying' may be identified by adults in children below this age, much of this behaviour needs to be understood as mislabeling or memory error, confusing fantasy with reality, and attempted wish-fulfilment. Compare Gordon's discussion (drawing on similar material to Vasek) of the relation between factive emotions, the attribution of knowledge and belief, and prediction of our own and others' behaviour (1987, Ch.7).

one's belief. So it seems that there must be something like a shared expectation, which this presentation latches on to.

If I am correct in suggesting that lying involves this higher-order insincerity, that the insincerity is with regard to an invocation of trust, and that the invocation operates with regard to a shared expectation, then the expectation might be characterised as: speakers are truthful or sincere when acting so as to give a hearer reason to think that they intend the hearer to recognize the speaker as presenting their belief. This would mean that when in lying we act so as to give a hearer reason to think that we intend them to recognize us as presenting our belief, we invoke trust, because there is an expectation that in this we are sincere. The examples from Augustine were not lies because there was no expectation of such sincerity operating, and so no trust to invoke, and the speaker acted with this in mind.¹¹

A simpler choice for an expectation here would be: speakers are truthful or sincere in the presentation of their belief. This is contained in and implied by the expectation, but in itself would not do the job, since it does not specify presenting belief *to* someone. The crucial insincerity in lying is insincerity in the face of an

¹¹ Dennett (1976, p.187) describes communication 'in Gricean guise' as a sort of collaborative manipulation of audience by utterer.

It depends, not only on the rationality of the audience who must sort out the utterer's intentions, but on the audience's *trust* in the utterer. ... [T]he *norm* for utterance is sincerity; were utterances not normally trustworthy, they would fail of their purpose.

Lying, as a form of deception, can only work against a background of truth-telling

Dennett takes the capacity for verbal communication as one of six conditions for personhood. He draws attention to the role of higher order intentions (held and assumed by utterer and audience) and the mutual recognition that must arise in verbal communication.

acknowledged mutuality of speaker and audience. It has the force of a betrayal; something which is not involved in that insincerity which is just untruthfulness.¹²

In order for a project of lying to be fully realised the one to whom the lie is directed must have this expectation, and they must have it in conjunction with a recognition of the possibility of untruthfulness. If you have no expectation, then my lie must fail; and if you have the expectation, but (although I do not know it) you do not recognize the possibility of untruthfulness, then, while I will not be disappointed, my lie will be somehow empty. My action fails to engage the complete interactive mechanism of lying, since my invocation is pointless—you trust me (in effect) anyway.

It is natural to think of the expectation as a convention with the weight of a moral obligation—but it is not immediately obvious from the logic of the situation why lying should have a moral status. As a first step, it is perhaps conceivable that the expectation could exist for someone simply as an experienced regularity of behaviour—a regularity that is not perceived as rule- or convention-following. Such a person might just think that this is what people are like. When I lie to such a person the whole mechanism of lying is engaged, and my invocation is in no way empty—they do not trust me just because I assert something, they do when and because I invoke their trust. They might find deviations puzzling and distressing, but they would not see them as motivated. Such naïvety would no doubt be unusual and short lived—but it cannot be ruled out as a possibility. Note also that such a person would (almost certainly) be incapable of lying because they would not recognize the possibility, for themselves or others, of insincere invocation of trust.

For most people, however, the expectation is a convention, and a convention with the force of a moral obligation (at least in default)—and for support I appeal to the reader's experience. Just why this is so is a more difficult question, but that there is

¹² As I noted earlier, there may be cases of insincerity that is just untruthfulness which we do call lying (examples from war and so on), but these seem to be different applications of the term. Kant rejects all lying but allows untruthfulness when it is mutually clear that the other has no

such a basis for the expectation suggests that lying, while not depending on a general recognition of its possibility, does in fact operate in the face of a mutual recognition of its possibility.

That is, people tend, in as much as they have the expectation on which lying depends, to have this expectation in the light of a perceived shared moral obligation to fulfil the expectation. Because of this, I suggest, they regard the obligation as operating against a recognized possibility, and a possibility that is intentional or motivated.

We are not yet justified in claiming that this is true of all fully-fledged members of a linguistic community, but we can, I think, claim that those members who have the capacity to lie recognize the expectation upon which they play as resting on a convention which precludes lying. This is so because a liar recognizes that lying is a possibility subject to the will of the liar, and recognizes, in as much as he or she takes others as generally sharing that capacity and this perspective of others, that this is generally so for others. A liar therefore recognizes that in as much as others have this expectation, they have it, not because they take lying to be beyond the will of speakers, but because they take speakers to generally choose to conform to the expectation. A liar therefore recognizes that when he or she lies it is done in the face of an expectation that he or she chooses to conform but is able to choose otherwise. Accepting this as a preliminary account of a convention, a liar therefore acts, self-consciously, against a convention—one with a moral dimension.

So, in engaging in lying we assume a general presumption that it is wrong, because in presenting ourselves as sincerely asserting we present ourselves as obeying an expectation—an expectation that precludes lying as a possibility we can choose, and, as a matter of fact, precludes it morally. This is the case even for someone who lies believing that lying is good (perhaps because it keeps everyone on their toes, or emphasises to the liar his or her psychic autonomy). Such a person must still lie with the presumption against it as a background.

reason to expect the truth. So while I allow two applications of the term, he denies that such cases are lies. See Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, p.277 (quoted in Chisholm and Feehan [1977], p.148).

Many philosophers have condemned lying (either absolutely or in default), though for different reasons. Plato generally thought that lying was bad because it was likely to destroy the state; Augustine thought that it shows a hatred of Truth (with Truth understood in terms of the Word of God), and that it is an abuse of the gift of communication; Kant thought that it is ruled out by the categorical imperative. In more recent writers we find that the consequences of lying rule it out (in all or most cases), because it undermines the trust necessary for communication and community, or gradually breaks down the integrity of the liar; alternatively, lying is criticised because of the way it restricts the right of others to the truth, autonomy, power or knowledge.¹³

I do not wish to evaluate these responses, but I think that the account of lying presented here and the consequences I have drawn from that account help explain why lying arouses moral concern, and why the expectation not to lie has moral weight. When I lie to you I do not just treat you as an object to be deceived, regarding you as an obstacle or a means to an end. When I lie to you I engage, at the core of the lie, the mutuality of our personhood. I do not just dismiss you as a person; I appeal to you as a person, and then use that against you. Lying has the moral intensity it does because it draws on and abuses the core of interaction and communality.¹⁴

All this implies that in lying a liar must take the subject to whom he or she lies as occupying a certain position in a moral domain, which is to say that a liar must

¹³ As examples of some fairly recent discussions, see Bok (1979), Betz (1985), and Wiles (1988). For Plato, see (for example) *The Republic*, Part 3, Sect.1 and Part 10 ; for Augustine see *On Lying*, and *Against Lying*; for Kant, see 'On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives.'

¹⁴ Compare Chisholm and Feehan again: 'Why is lying thought to be *worse*, other things being equal, than other types of intended deception? ... It is assumed that, 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. ... Lying, unlike the other types of intended deception, is essentially a breach of faith' (1977, p.153).
At this stage I will not take up the relation between liars and persons in detail, but the present account of liars meshes interestingly with accounts of persons. For example, the liar described here seems to possess the six necessary conditions of moral personhood discussed by Dennett (1976), and it seems likely that anyone meeting those six conditions will turn out to be capable

take the hearer as someone to whom he or she not only can lie but *will* lie. In lying to you, and in taking on the project of lying to you, I must, for example, regard you with a certain contempt, or regard the situation as for whatever reason justifying my lie to you;¹⁵ but in any case I must lie in the face of your status as a moral subject.

4. Conclusion

Lying thus generates and highlights a tension in interaction and language use. When we come upon subjects with those capacities and features that are necessary for lying, we seem also to come upon subjects with capacities and features that mark and produce the flourishing of interaction and language use. Lying is only possible given these capacities and features, and it operates through the liar playing on and betraying the mutuality which such features allow.¹⁶

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of lying according to my account. In that case, the capacity to lie is a necessary condition of being a person as characterised in such accounts.

¹⁵ We get an example of this in Part Three of the *Republic*, where spoken falsehood, although generally condemned, is recommended 'as a kind of preventive medicine against our enemies, or when anyone we call our friend tries to do something wrong from madness or folly' (*Republic*, 382c).

¹⁶ This paper has benefited discussions with Susan Dodds, Robert Dunn and Paul Patton. It has also benefited from the criticisms and suggestions of three anonymous reviewers for this journal.

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