

CHAPTER 2

CLASSIC PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACHES TO LYING AND DECEPTION

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

IN his Tanner Lectures on Human Values, "Truthfulness, Lies, and Moral Philosophy: What Can We Learn from Mill and Kant?" Alasdair MacIntyre claimed that there were two "two contrasting and generally rival traditions" on the morality of lying, one that could be traced back to Plato, and another that could be traced back to Aristotle (MacIntyre 1995: 316). The Platonic tradition sought to justify lying under certain circumstances. Its followers included John Milton, Jeremy Taylor, Samuel Johnson, and John Stuart Mill. The Aristotelian tradition condemned all lies. Its followers included Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, Blaise Pascal, Immanuel Kant, and John Henry Newman (MacIntyre 1995: 310–11, 315). While MacIntyre was right that Plato was much more permissive than Aristotle when it came to justifying lying,¹ nevertheless the views of Plato and Aristotle on the morality of lying² were different from those of Augustine, Aquinas, and Kant. It may be said, unequivocally, that Augustine, Aquinas, and Kant held the moral absolutist view that lying is always wrong and never justified (see Mahon 2009). This cannot be said about Aristotle, who, for example, permitted self-deprecating

¹ MacIntyre does not say if Socrates belongs to the tradition of Plato or the tradition of Aristotle when it comes to lying. As I shall argue below, Socrates was opposed to all lying, and may be said to belong to the same tradition as Augustine, Aquinas, and Kant.

² Following MacIntyre's example, I shall talk about philosophers' views on the 'morality' of lying rather than the 'ethics' of lying. Nothing of importance hangs on using this terminology. I do not mean to claim that all of these philosophers were working with the (modern) concepts of moral obligation, moral duty, etc. For an argument as to why 'morality' and 'ethics' are importantly different, see Anscombe (1958).

lies told by the magnanimous person. A better prospect as a holder of a moral absolutist view among the Ancient Greeks was Socrates, the teacher of Plato. In addition, but relatedly, Augustine, Aquinas, and Kant were more concerned about the distinction between lying and non-mendacious linguistic deception than either Plato or Aristotle. Finally, but also relatedly, Augustine and Aquinas showed greater concern with the definition of lying than either Plato or Aristotle (see Mahon 2014b). This chapter will be concerned exclusively with the views of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle on the morality of lying.

2.2 LYING AND THE ORDINARY MORALITY OF ANCIENT GREECE

Before considering the views of the ancient Greek philosophers on the morality of lying, it is necessary to say something about how lying was viewed in the ordinary morality of ancient Greece. Speaking very generally, while their ordinary morality opposed lying, it did not oppose all lying. The permissibility of lying to others depended, at least in part, on what kind of relation one had with the other person, in terms of class or status (e.g., a free person and a slave, or a master and a servant), sex or gender (men and women), position in the family or age (e.g., a parent and a child), and whether they were on opposing sides of a conflict (e.g., an ally versus an enemy in a war). Whether or not lying to someone else was permitted also depended on the mental state of the other person—whether the other person was sick, enraged, depressed, in severe pain, and so forth—as well as on whether telling the other person the truth would harm him/her in some way. It also depended on whether telling the other person the truth would lead to the other person harming himself/herself, and on whether lying to the other person would prevent some greater injustice.

In general, it was held that free men did not, and should not, lie. Lying was something done under compulsion rather than of one's own volition. The motives for lying were normally fear, need, and poverty. Those who lied under compulsion were not subject to the same moral opprobrium as those who had control over their own actions (Zembaty 1988: 527). In addition, lying and deceiving others could be judged as acting in a cowardly way: "Guile and deception, though often indispensable to victory in warfare, especially to offset numerical weakness, could arouse repugnance and guilt if used aggressively against a relatively weak adversary or one whose intentions are innocent; and, of course, those defeated by guile in war would vilify the successful enemy as cowardly, although they would not have hesitated to use the same degree of guile if the opportunity had presented itself" (Dover 1974: 170). Despite the possibility of lying being considered cowardly in war, lying to enemies, as opposed to lying to friends or allies, was permitted, or even required. In his *Memorabilia*, Xenophon has the character of Socrates—not the historical Socrates—say to the character of Euthydemus, about "deception," which is

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“Wrong,” that “So perhaps all the things that we have put under Wrong ought to be put under Right, too . . . it is right to do this sort of thing to enemies, but wrong to do it to friends” (Xenophon 1990: 183).

Servants could be prohibited from lying to masters and mistresses, because the truth was owed to their employer and superior (Zembaty 1988: 520). Adults were permitted to lie to children who were sick, however, in order to get them to take medicine. Similarly, although it was normally impermissible for offspring to lie to their parents, it was permitted if their parents were, say, ill, and unwilling to take medicine (Zembaty 1988: 524). In general, it was more permissible to lie to women and to young men than to adult men, especially to spare them from pain, although this was because women and young men were viewed as being weaker, mentally, than adult men (Zembaty 1988: 525).

Even adult men, however, could be lied to, if the altered mental state (rage, grief, etc.) of the adult man was such that telling him the truth would result in some harm to him, or would lead him to harm himself. In Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*, the character of Socrates approved of a general lying to his troops when they are “disheartened” (Xenophon 1990: 183). It was much rarer to justify telling lies to adult men simply in order to prevent them from harming others (Zembaty 1988: 525 n. 22). Lying to adult men whose mental states were not altered, merely in order to spare them pain, was not considered morally acceptable (Zembaty 1988: 527). Finally, it was permissible to lie to prevent greater injustice, or to make possible “the performance of a morally required action which the deceived person intends to prevent” (Zembaty 1988: 532). Nevertheless, lying to others simply in order to benefit them—purely benevolent lies—seems to have not been seen as justified (Zembaty 1988: 528, 540).

This view of lying is captured at least in part in the early sections of Plato’s *Republic*. The character of Cephalus, who may be said to represent ancient Greek ordinary morality, is initially prepared to agree that justice is “truthfulness and returning what one has received from someone” (Plato 2006: 5). However, as soon as it is suggested to him that “if one received weapons from a friend in his right mind who then went mad and demanded them back,” then one should not “be willing to tell the whole truth to a person in that condition,” he replies, “You’re right” (Plato 2006: 5). His considered position, therefore, is that lying to people who are not in their right mind is justified. Later his son, Polemarchus, defends the position attributed to Simonides that “justice is treating friends well and enemies badly” (Plato 2006: 7). It can be assumed that treating enemies badly includes lying to them, and hence that his position incorporates a “rejection of the view that justice entails truth-telling” (Page 1991: 4). Both Cephalus and Polemarchus may be said to embody the ordinary morality of ancient Greece when it comes to the morality of lying: it is permissible, at the very least, to lie to enemies, and to those who are not in their right mind.

In different ways, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle each rejected the ordinary morality of ancient Greece when it came to the morality of lying, although perhaps Aristotle’s position was closest to it.

2.3 SOCRATES AND LIES

Socrates appears to have been opposed to all lying. Karl Popper, Plato's great critic, "emphatically contrasts Plato's views on lying with Socrates's strong commitment to truth" (Zembaty 1988: 517; see Popper 1971). As Socrates says in the *Apology*, in a speech that is supposed to be faithful to what he said at his actual trial in 399 BC, he is "the man who speaks the truth" (Plato 2002: 22). Socrates did not believe that it would be morally permissible for him to lie even to an enemy. As Socrates says in the *Crito*, another dialogue that is supposed to provide us with the views of the historical Socrates: "One should never ... do any man harm, no matter what he may have done to you" (Plato 2002: 52). Socrates's prohibition on lying even to enemies was a significant departure from ordinary Greek morality: "Greek thinking takes it for granted that while lies are ordinarily harmful to those deceived, harming enemies is not only morally acceptable but even morally required—a view rejected by Plato's Socrates" (Zembaty 1993: 25).

Socrates believed that the gods never lied. In the *Euthyphro*, another dialogue that is supposed to provide us with the views of the historical Socrates, the character of Socrates tells his interlocutor, the priest Euthyphro, that he finds it "hard to accept things ... said about the gods" by other Athenians, such as "there really is war among the gods, and terrible enmities and battles" (Plato 2002: 7) and that "different gods consider different things to be just, beautiful, ugly, good, and bad" (Plato 2002: 9). Socrates believed the gods were completely good and that they did not disagree about anything, a view of the gods which was highly unorthodox,³ and which, some have argued, was the reason he was put on trial for impiety and executed.⁴ In particular, he believed that the gods never lied. About the god that speaks through the oracle at Delphi he is reported as saying: "surely he [the god] does not lie; it is not legitimate for him to do so" (Plato 2002: 26). In holding that it is "not legitimate" for a god to lie, Socrates was rejecting the view of the relationship between the gods and lying found in ancient Greek theology.

In the dialogues that are supposed to provide us with his actual views, Socrates did not consider the question of lying to those whose mental states are altered. It is true that, as was mentioned above, in the early part of the *Republic* the character of Socrates argues, against Cephalus, that it would be just to lie to a friend who has gone mad, in order to prevent him from harming himself or others. However, this view cannot simply be attributed to Socrates, since the same character of Socrates, speaking for Plato, makes many claims in the *Republic* that Socrates would reject.

³ As Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith have said, "To those of us raised in religions that affirm the omnibenevolence of God, Socrates' commitment to the complete goodness and benevolence of the gods does not seem at all strange. But in the context of ancient Greece, such beliefs appear not to have been the norm ... Socrates' conception of fully moral gods, then, is not consistent with much of Greek mythology" (Brickhouse and Smith 2000: 236).

⁴ See Vlastos (1991) and Burnyeat (1997).

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2.4 SOCRATES AND IRONY

Despite his stated opposition to lying, there remains the question of whether Socrates could have been in good faith opposed to all lying, since he was often accused of deceiving others. In his trial, as well as in dialogues which are believed to be historically accurate on this point, Socrates tells his interlocutors that he lacks ethical knowledge and that he is not a teacher. This would seem to have been deceptive self-deprecation or false modesty, since he agreed with the god (who spoke through the oracle at Delphi) that no-one was "wiser" than he was (Plato 2002: 26). In the *Republic*, the character of Thrasymachus reacts to what he takes to be the "irony" (*eirōneia*) displayed by the character of Socrates in his debate with the character of Polemarchus: "Heracles! he said. Here, is that accustomed irony [*eirōneia*] of Socrates. I knew it! I told these people in advance that you would refuse to answer, that you would play the sly fox and do anything rather than answer if someone asked you something" (Plato 2006: 14). Thrasymachus is here castigating Socrates as an *eirōn*, that is, someone who uses *eirōneia*: "*eirōneia* is the use of deception to profit at the expense of another by presenting oneself as benign in an effort to disarm the intended victim" (Wolfsdorf 2007: 175).

However, Socrates's defenders have insisted that Socrates did not engage in *eirōneia*. Although, as Gregory Vlastos has pointed out, "the intention to deceive, so alien to our word for irony, is normal in its Greek ancestor *eirōneia*," over time, "from Greece in the fourth century B.C. to Rome in the first ... the word has now lost its disagreeable overtones" (Vlastos 1991: 28; see also Weinrich 2005). Its connotation changed to "speech used to express a meaning that runs contrary to what is said" (Vlastos 1991: 28). According to Vlastos, it was Socrates himself who effected this change in its meaning, and removed the deceptive connotation: "What, I submit, we can say is *who* made it happen: Socrates" (Vlastos 1991: 29). If Socrates himself, by his example, changed the meaning of *eirōneia*, from a certain kind of deceptive behavior to modern, non-deceptive irony, he cannot have been guilty of deceiving his interlocutors.

For Vlastos, not only is Socrates not engaged in *eirōneia*, in the traditional deceptive sense, but Socrates's statements about his lacking ethical knowledge and not being a teacher are not even ironic, in the modern, non-deceptive sense. Socrates's 'false modesty' is actually sincere modesty. This is what Vlastos calls Socrates's "complex" irony: what he says is true in one sense, even if it is false in another:

Here we see a new form of irony, unprecedented in Greek literature to my knowledge, which is peculiarly Socratic. For want of a better name, I shall call it "complex irony" ... In "simple" irony what is said just isn't what is meant: taken in its ordinary, commonly understood, sense the statement is simply false. In "complex" irony what is said both is and isn't what is meant: its surface content is meant to be true in one sense, false in another ... So too, I would argue, Socrates's parallel disavowal of teaching should be understood as complex irony. In the conventional sense, where to "teach" is simply to transfer knowledge from a teacher's to a learner's mind, Socrates

means what he says: that sort of teaching he does not do. But in the sense which *he* would give to “teaching”—engaging would-be learners in elenctic argument to make them aware of their own ignorance and enable them to discover for themselves the truth the teacher had held back—in that sense of “teaching” Socrates would want to say that he *is* a teacher.

(Vlastos 1991: 32; see also Brickhouse and Smith 2000)

Even if Socrates’s defenders are correct in saying that Socrates did not engage in *eirōneia*, in the traditional deceptive sense, because he was sincere in his claims that he lacked ethical knowledge and was not a teacher, there however, the objection that Socrates was insincere with his interlocutors in a different way. Socrates often claimed that those he debated with were wise, when he believed no such thing. As Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith have said, Socrates does appear to have engaged in *deceptive false praise*:

any time we find Socrates calling one of his interlocutors “wise,” attributing knowledge to him, or saying that he hopes to become the other’s “student,” what we have called mocking irony is at work ... Those guilty of the most extreme or dangerous pretensions (such as Euthyphro and Hippias) are given the most lavish ironical praise ... Thus we have found at least one form of irony that Socrates commonly uses, which we have called mocking irony ... There does seem to be clear mocking irony when Socrates calls others wise or “recognizes” them as ones who have the knowledge that he, himself, claims to lack. But the mockery does not work by his own disclaimer of such things; the irony is in the mocking compliments and flattery Socrates lavishes on others. So Socrates is not guilty of mock-modesty; his modesty is genuine. His praise of others, however, is often mock-praise and not at all sincere—there is mockery in such praise.

(Brickhouse and Smith 2000: 63)

Their contention supports the argument of Jane Zembaty that “Putting aside the vexing question of the sincerity of Socrates’s profession of ignorance, we can still find numerous examples of ‘ironic’ statements made by Socrates to an interlocutor, praising his knowledge and wisdom while leading him to a state of *aporia* and revealing his ignorance to his audience” (Zembaty 1988: 544). If Socrates did engage in such deceptive false praise, then it can be argued that he did engage in *eirōneia*, in the traditional deceptive sense.

Zembaty has considered the question of whether “Socrates would reject all lies as immoral,” given his false praise of others, and has argued⁵ that it is possible to understand Socrates’s false praise as

the use of falsity in words in order to prevent someone in a mad or anoetic state from harming himself or others. On Socrates [sic] view, after all, those with incorrect beliefs about virtue *are* in a defective cognitive state ... If “lies” told to them during the

⁵ Zembaty credits Elinor J. M. West with this line of argument.

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However, this is to make Socrates's false praise turn out to be regular deceptive lying, and not even merely *eirōneia*, in the traditional deceptive sense. If Socrates believed that he was justified in lying to those who have incorrect beliefs about virtue, in order to alleviate their ignorance or lessen their potential to harm others, then it seems that he would have believed that he was justified in lying to the jury at his trial, and to Meletus, since he believed that the jury, and certainly Meletus, had incorrect beliefs about virtue, and were harming others with their prosecution of him. This seems implausible.

The only way, it seems, to defend Socrates from the accusation that his false praise was *eirōneia*, in the traditional deceptive sense, is to argue that his false praise, while certainly false, was not deceptive at all, because it was ironic, in the modern, non-deceptive sense. This is to argue that his false praise was "simple" irony, in Vlastos's terminology. That is, Socrates was indeed mocking the pretensions of others with his false praise, but he was not deceiving them.

If it is granted that his use of irony to mock the pretensions of others was not deceptive, it follows that Socrates's use of irony to mock others was consistent with his opposition to all lying. Such an opposition to all lying, of course, would amount to a rejection of the ordinary morality of ancient Greece when it came to lying.

2.5 PLATO ON REAL FALSEHOODS AND FALSEHOODS IN WORDS

In contrast to Socrates, Plato explicitly defended lying in his most important work of moral and political philosophy, the *Republic*. Plato's defense of lying went far beyond the defense of lying contained in the ordinary morality of ancient Greece.

Like Socrates, Plato held that gods were only "good," that they never "do harm," and that they were never "responsible for any evil" (Plato 2006: 64). Instead, the gods were "beneficial" and "responsible for things that are good" and not "for all things" (Plato 2006: 64–5). The gods, furthermore, did not alter in any way, since they were "most beautiful and as good as possible," and for a god to alter himself would have been to "willingly make himself worse" (Plato 2006: 66). The gods did not change their shape, they did not "take on all sorts of disguises" (Plato 2006: 65–7). Further, the gods did not "use deception and magic to make us think that they appear in many different forms," because a god would not have been "willing to deceive in word or deed by putting forth a false appearance" (Plato 2006: 67). According to Plato, the gods did not lie.

Plato distinguishes between two types of falsehood (the Greek term ψεύδω "can mean 'lie' or 'falsehood'" (Baima 2017: 2 n. 3)). The first kind of falsehood, a "real falsehood"

(or a “true falsehood”) (Plato 2006: 67, 68), is to be contrasted with what may be called a real truth. Real falsehoods are about “things which are,” which Plato also says are “the most determinative things” (Plato 2006: 67). To say that real falsehoods are about the “most determinative things” means that they are about morality (see Baima 2017) or about moral reality—the eternal, immutable Forms, especially the Form of the Good and the Form of Justice (see Brickhouse and Smith 1983; Simpson 2007; Woolf 2009). Correspondingly, real truths are truths about morality or about moral reality. Real falsehoods would include ‘unjust people can be happy’, ‘just people can be unhappy’, ‘injustice can be to one’s own advantage’, and ‘justice can be contrary to one’s own advantage’. Plato says that real falsehoods are “in the soul of him who is deceived” (Plato 2006: 67), which implies that they are believed, and not merely spoken. In the case of a real falsehood, the person believes the falsehood to be true, and is ignorant of the real truth (e.g., ‘injustice is always to one’s own advantage’). Real falsehoods are the very worst kind of falsehoods. They cannot be beneficial, either directly or indirectly. Everyone “especially fears” these falsehoods and everyone “refuses to be willingly deceived” in this way: “no one would choose to be deceived and in error in their soul about things which are, or be ignorant and have what is false there. They would least accept falsehood and especially hate it in that quarter” (Plato 2006: 67). Real falsehoods are “hated” by the gods (Plato 2006: 68). The gods never tell these ‘pure’ lies, as they may be called.⁶

In addition to a real falsehood, there is also a “falsehood in words” (Plato 2006: 68) or a “not quite falsehood unmixed” (Plato 2006: 68), that is, a mixed or impure falsehood. Falsehoods in words, or impure falsehoods, are not about “the most determinative things.” They are not about morality or moral reality. They are about things that are, as it were, not important: “A verbal falsehood misrepresents only unimportant things (unimportant in the scheme of Platonic things)” (Simpson 2007: 345). Falsehoods in words are about the non-moral, natural, facts.⁷ Plato says that a falsehood in words is an “imitation . . . in words,” or “a mere image” (Plato 2006: 67). In the case of falsehoods in words, the person does not believe the falsehood in words to be true. The person either knows the truth, or knows that the falsehood is not true. The falsehood is in the words of the speaker, but not in the speaker’s soul (Baima 2017: 7).

Falsehoods in words may be divided into myths and regular lies. *Mythoi*, or myths or false stories (“fiction”; see Page 1991: 8), are to be contrasted with true stories, or histories. True stories, or histories, are “accurate reports about matters (human affairs) concerning which factual knowledge is possible. Plato’s concept of truth in this context is, then, close to our concept of factual truth” (Belfiore 1985: 49). By contrast, myths are false stories in which factual knowledge is not possible (at least for human beings), because they are about the distant past, or life after death, or about life from a divine perspective (Gill 1993: 56), and are about gods, heroes, the underworld, and so forth: “Plato’s

⁶ Although Plato never refers to real falsehoods or lies as ‘pure’ falsehoods or lies, they may be called pure falsehoods or lies for the purpose of contrasting them with impure falsehoods or lies.

⁷ Baima says that Plato “does not specify the content of impure falsehoods” (Baima 2017: 3), but all the examples that Plato gives of impure falsehoods concern non-moral, natural, facts.

mythoi,” “false stories which we cannot ascribe to these things” (Belfiore 1985: 49).

Regular lies, unimportant and can be had in words or what might be called “regular lies.” These include lies told to friends who have benefited themselves or others. Regular lies are not harmful.

In addition to regular falsehoods in words, or regular lies, the gods tell regular lies. The gods are never ignorant of life, etc.: “How then do they through not knowing have no need of regular lies of being harmed, since they are enemies out of fear? (to their friends when they tell such friends: “No one would do this for this reason” (Plato 2006: 68). This kind—either pure or impure falsehood” (Plato 2006: 68).

2.6 PLATONIC

Like the gods, according to Plato, that is, falsehoods are as much as benefits to people as much as benefits (Plato 2006: 68). Plato says that in his own words “to say this in his own words in verse or prose” (Plato 2006: 68).

In contrast to the regular falsehoods in words—regular lies—of the ideal state are regular lies and regular lies as well as benefits, and may use medicinal lies: “Again, truth is just now, and false lies as medicine, it is clear

mythoi,” “false stories,” are, then, stories “about gods, heroes, and other matters about which we cannot ascertain the truth, told by those who pretend to know the truth about these things” (Belfiore 1985: 49).

Regular lies, unlike myths, are about human affairs, about which knowledge is possible and can be had by humans. They are deliberate falsehoods: “the deception woven in words or what might usually be thought of as a lie in the primary sense” (Page 1991: 16). These include lies told to deceive enemies, out of fear of being harmed, and lies told to friends who have become mad or foolish, in order to stop them from harming themselves or others. Regular lies are to be contrasted with regular truthful statements.

In addition to never telling real falsehoods, or pure lies, the gods also never tell falsehoods in words, or impure lies. That is, the gods never create myths, and they never tell regular lies. The gods have no need of myths, the first kind of impure lie, since the gods are never ignorant about factual knowledge, including the past, or about the after-life, etc.: “How then is falsehood useful to the god? Would he make false likenesses through not knowing the past? That’s ridiculous” (Plato 2006: 68). The gods also have no need of regular lies. The gods never need to lie to deceive their enemies out of fear of being harmed, since, as gods, they are never afraid. “But would he deceive his enemies out of fear? Of course not” (Plato 2006: 68). The gods also never need to lie to their friends when their friends become mad or act foolishly, since the gods do not have such friends: “No one foolish or mad is loved by the gods. So it’s not possible to deceive for this reason” (Plato 2006: 68). In general, the gods do not tell falsehoods or lies of any kind—either pure or impure: “So what is spiritual and divine is in every way without falsehood” (Plato 2006: 68).

2.6 PLATO ON GOOD MYTHS AND BAD MYTHS

Like the gods, according to Plato, people should never tell real falsehoods, or pure lies, that is, falsehoods about morality or moral reality. Real falsehoods should be hated by people as much as by the gods: “real falsehood is hated not only by gods but also by men” (Plato 2006: 68). Pure lies are completely prohibited by Plato in his ideal state: “No one is to say this in his own city, if it is to be well governed, nor is anyone, young or old, to hear it in verse or prose” (Plato 2006: 65).

In contrast to the gods, however, people must and should tell both types of falsehoods in words—myths and regular lies. Nevertheless, in the *Republic*, only the rulers of the ideal state are allowed to engage in this falsehood-telling. Only the rulers may tell myths and regular lies, and only to non-rulers. Falsehoods in words may harm as well as benefit, and they may be used only by experts in morality, just as only doctors may use medicinal drugs, since they are knowledgeable of the craft (*technē*) of medicine: “Again, truth must be counted of the utmost importance. For if we were right just now, and falsehood really is useless to gods, and useful to men only as a form of medicine, it is clear that such a thing must be administered by physicians, and not

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of the craft (*technē*) of
medicine: “Again, truth
must be counted of the
utmost importance. For
if we were right just
now, and falsehood really
is useless to gods, and
useful to men only as a
form of medicine, it is
clear that such a thing
must be administered by
physicians, and not

gods” (Plato 2006: 68) or
lies, they may be called
falsehoods or lies.
Baima 2017: 3), but all the
truths.

lies. *Mythoi*, or myths
about true stories, or his-
torical events (human affairs)
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are about human beings),
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son, and so forth: “Plato’s

or lies, they may be called
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Baima 2017: 3), but all the
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touched by laymen ... Then it belongs to the rulers of the city—if indeed to anyone—to deceive enemies or citizens for the benefit of the city. No one else is to touch such a thing ... So if the ruler catches anyone else in the city lying, “among the craftsmen, prophet or physician or carpenter,” he will punish him for introducing a practice as subversive and destructive to a city as it is to a ship” (Plato 2006: 74–5).

Plato divides both types of falsehoods told by rulers—myths and regular lies—into good and bad falsehoods, according to whether or not they benefit those non-rulers to whom they are told. Myths are divided into good myths and bad myths (Belfiore 1985: 50). Good myths are falsehoods in words that contain real truths for their listeners and that are as close to the truth as possible. They do not contain any falsehoods about the gods causing anything evil, or engaging in any lying or deceiving: “Good stories ... are those that make the young better, by conforming to two “patterns,” *typoi*: (1) that the gods are the cause of good things only and not of evil, and (2) that the gods do not change shape or otherwise deceive humans. These patterns do not concern specific events and deeds, but deal with the nature of the gods” (Belfiore 1985: 50). Plato advocates telling these myths “concerning events about which we cannot know the truth but which are consistent with what we do know about the nature of the gods” (Belfiore 1985: 52).

Bad myths, by contrast, Plato condemns. These myths are falsehoods in words that contain real falsehoods: “falsehoods unlike what could happen in a world with truthful and good divinities” (Belfiore 1985: 50). Plato condemns Hesiod and Homer, not because they tell myths, but because they are in “error about the gods” (Plato 2006: 64). They “composed falsehoods” and “misrepresent[ed] the nature of gods and heroes in discourse”—for example, the falsehood about Uranos imprisoning his children, and the falsehood about his son Cronus castrating him at the request of his mother, Gaia (Plato 2006: 62), and that “Theseus son of Poseidon and Peirithus son of Zeus were thus moved to terrible rapes,” and in general “that any other kind of hero and child of a god ventured to do terrible and impious deeds such as are now falsely told of them” (Plato 2006: 77). In addition to depicting the gods as warring with one another and being the cause of evil, they also depicted the gods as lying to and deceiving humans. Such “‘false’ representations of gods and heroes produces [sic] ‘falsehood in the psyche’” (Gill 1993: 50). These writers are in error about morality and moral reality: “poets and prose writers therefore speak badly about what is most important for men, claiming that many men are happy but unjust, or just but wretched, and that the doing of injustice is profitable if it escapes detection, which justice is another’s good and one’s own loss” (Plato 2006: 78). Bad myths, “produced by people who are ignorant in their psyche ‘about the most important things,’ instil falsehoods in the psyche of their audience” (Gill 1993: 45–6), and harm listeners.

In contrast to Hesiod, Homer, and others, “the mythographers of Plato’s ideal state ... know the truth about the nature of the gods and can therefore tell stories like the truth” (Belfiore 1985: 51). Such good myths told by the rulers, which may be incorrect about non-moral, natural and historical facts, even as they are as close to the truth as possible, but which are correct about the moral nature of the gods and about morality, contain real truths, and will be of benefit to the other citizens. They will instill real truths

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in souls. Most important of all are the good myths told by the rulers to children in Plato's ideal state, as described early on in the *Republic*:

You don't understand, I replied, that we first tell children stories? Taken as a whole they are surely false, but there is also truth in them ... then, it seems, we must supervise the storytellers, accepting what they do well and rejecting what they don't. We'll persuade nurses and mothers to tell the children only what is acceptable, and to shape their souls with their stories even more than their bodies with their hands. Most of what they tell now has to be discarded.

(Plato 2006: 61–2)

Plato does not only defend telling good myths to children, however. He also defends telling good myths to adult citizens. The most famous good myth of the *Republic* is the *gennaion pseudos*, or “noble lie” (Plato 2006: 106). This myth or lie is “not ‘noble’ in the sense of *kalos*, which is to say aesthetically beautiful or fine,” but rather “‘noble’ in the sense of ‘well-born’ or ‘well-conceived’ ... The noble lie will generate an ideal just state by falsifying the origin, or generation of the citizens” (Carmola 2003: 40).⁸ There are three parts to this myth. The first part (Baima 2017: 15) consists of telling people that everything “they thought they experienced—namely, that we reared and educated them—all happened as it were in a dream” (Plato 2006: 107). The second part is the so-called “Myth of Autochthony” (Page 1991: 22) that all of the citizens were “beneath the earth, being formed and nurtured within it,” and that “When they were once fully completed, Earth, who is their mother, brought them forth, and now they must take counsel for the defense of their country as for a mother and nurse, if anyone comes against it, and consider the rest of their fellow citizens as brothers born of Earth” (Plato 2006: 107). This chthonic myth binds the citizens together as siblings with a common parent, and motivates them to defend the state against enemies. However, the final and most important part of the myth is the so-called “Myth of the Metals” (Plato 2006: 106), where the citizens are told that each of them has had a metal mixed into their soul, which determines which class they will belong to in a strict caste system: gold for the ruling guardian class, silver for the army auxiliary class, and iron and bronze for the working craftsman class: “the god, in fashioning those among you who are competent to rule, mixed gold into them at birth, whereby they are most precious, and silver into the auxiliaries, and iron and bronze into the farmers and the other craftsmen” (Plato 2006: 107). It is the job of the ruling guardian class to monitor this caste system and keep all but the gold-souled individuals out of the ruling class, as well as to make sure that those who are gold-souled get to join the ruling class:

it is possible that a silver child should be born of gold, or a golden child born of silver, and so all the rest from one another ... If their own offspring are born alloyed with

⁸ Karl Popper calls it a “lordly lie” (Popper 1971: 140). He also refers to the myths about the origins of the ideal state as the “Myth of Blood and Soil” (Popper 1971: 140).

bronze or iron, they will assign it the grade appropriate to its nature and thrust it out among craftsmen or farmers without pity. And again, if any born from the latter are alloyed with silver or gold, they will honor them and lead them up, some to guardianship, others as auxiliaries, because of a prophecy that the city will be destroyed when guarded by iron or bronze.

(Plato 2006: 107)

Whereas the Myth of Autochthony “unifies the city by making the citizens think that they are all related,” which benefits the citizens by “facilitating harmonious relations among them,” the Myth of the Metals “divides the city by putting the city into distinct classes,” which “provides the members of the different classes with an explanation for why members of different classes have different lifestyles and different political obligations” (Baima 2017: 15). Since the real reason why people are rulers, auxiliaries, and craftspeople is their natural abilities, maintaining the class division through this myth will benefit all of the citizens.

2.7 PLATO ON GOOD LIES

Myths are not regular lies. As it has been said, “it is not obvious that the pious yet historically ill-informed stories are lies, since it would be peculiar to regard telling myths to children as lying. There might be an accompanying act that is a lie (if we said: and this is a true story). Nor is it obvious that the myth of the metals, as it is presented, is a lie” (Simpson 2007: 345). Plato also divides regular lies into good lies and bad lies, and defends the telling of good lies. Whereas bad lies harm people, good lies benefit people. Children are to be told good lies, such as that no citizen has ever quarreled with another citizen: “But if somehow we can persuade them that not a single citizen ever quarreled with another, nor is it pious, that’s the sort of thing old men and women should tell to children from the very first” (Plato 2006: 63). Adults are to be told good lies, also. Plato defends lies told “against enemies” and to “so-called friends, when through madness or some folly they undertake to do something evil” (Plato 2006: 68). Although it is not a lie told by a ruler, in the early part of the *Republic*, the character of Socrates, in his debate with Cephalus about the nature of justice, defends lying to a friend who has gone mad and who will harm himself or others.

Nevertheless, Plato goes further than defending good regular lies told to children, to enemies, and to friends who have gone mad. In the *Republic* Plato says that “The rulers will need to use a quite considerable amount of falsehood and deception for the benefit of those ruled. But we said, I think, that all such things are useful only in the form of medicine” (Plato 2006: 161). The most important good regular lie in the *Republic* is the lie, or set of lies, told by the rulers to non-rulers about the ideal state’s eugenic practices. In order “for the race of Guardians to be kept pure,” the “best must be mated to

best as often as possible but not the other. Rulers themselves, if, against eternal strife” (Plato 2006: 107). The best citizen is to be free of jealousy and fighting. In each pairing, the inferior is being married, just as the superior that they were married “as offspring continue and “They will take them to nurses who dwell with parents, or any other and out-of-the-way will be lied to by the children, when in fact among the younger generation as their parents and as their parents people as rulers of the of all citizens.

2.8 P

In the *Republic* Plato such as the sexual lot. As Zembaty points out, “talk about benefit,” a ruler is to tell medicine merely to prevent harm (Plato 2006: 540). Lying is now judicial to all. Ordinary (Plato 2006: 161) to make them better (Zembaty 1988: 543). to people simply in c

⁹ I say paternalism rather than person who is lied to, without the person’s consent.

best as often as possible, worst to worst oppositely, and the offspring of the one raised but not the other. And that all this is taking place must be unknown except to the rulers themselves, if, again, the herd of Guardians is to be kept as free as possible from internal strife" (Plato 2006: 161–2). The best way to ensure that the best citizens mate with the best citizens is to arrange marriages only between them. However, in order to avoid jealousy and fighting, it will be necessary to "devise a clever system of lots," so that "at each pairing, the inferior fellow we mentioned will blame chance, not the rulers" for not being married, just as the best citizens will believe that it was by means of a sexual lottery that they were married (Plato 2006: 162). In addition, to ensure the purity of the rulers, "as offspring continue to be born, officials appointed for this purpose will receive them," and "They will take the offspring of good parents, I think, and carry them to the nursery, to nurses who dwell separately in another part of the city. But the offspring of inferior parents, or any others who may perhaps be born defective, they will conceal in a secret and out-of-the-way place, as is proper" (Plato 2006: 162). Parents of inferior offspring will be lied to by the rulers about their children being communally raised with the other children, when in fact they will be left to die. Some parents will thus not have children among the younger generation, although they will look upon all of the younger generation as their children, and the younger generation will look upon all of the older generation as their parents. These lies about the city's eugenic practices will help keep the best people as rulers of the ideal city, and help to maintain solidarity and unity, for the benefit of all citizens.

2.8 PLATO AND PATERNALISTIC LIES

In the *Republic* Plato says that rulers are justified in lying to non-rulers about matters such as the sexual lottery and infanticide "in order to benefit the polis" (Plato 2006: 536). As Zembaty points out, there is "shift here from talk about the prevention of harm to talk about benefit," a shift that "seems to widen the scope of justifiable lies," since "rulers are to tell medicinal lies whenever they are necessary to benefit the polis and not merely to prevent harm" (either to the person lied to or to others) (Zembaty 1988: 536, 540). Lying is now justified "to foster unity" (Zembaty 1988: 539), which will be beneficial to all. Ordinary Greek morality did not justify lying "to individuals simply in order to make them better or to make them as beneficial as possible to themselves and others" (Zembaty 1988: 543). This is an extreme form of paternalism⁹ which would justify lying to people simply in order to benefit them, as opposed to lying to them to prevent them

⁹ I say paternalism rather than beneficence since a beneficent lie does not necessarily benefit the person who is lied to, whereas a paternalistic lie necessarily benefits the person who is lied to, albeit without the person's consent.

from being harmed, or to prevent them from harming others.¹⁰ Despite what Popper says about Plato being “utilitarian” (Popper 1971: 140), this “approach is not a utilitarian one,” since “his main criterion for determining which beliefs should be possessed is the welfare of their possessor not society overall,” and there is nothing that would support the idea that Plato “would countenance sacrificing the interest of a subject for the wider good of the city” (Woolf 2009: 24, 26 n. 32).¹¹ However, since Plato defends telling lies to enemies in the same way that he defends telling lies to friends who have gone mad, “Perhaps even the treatment of enemies with falsehood is thought of as bestowing benefit on them to the extent that it prevents bad behavior on their part” (Woolf 2009: 26).

Plato departed from the ordinary morality of ancient Greece when it came to the morality of lying insofar as he “greatly widened the scope of justified lies,” with the proviso, of course, “that these lies can only be told by properly trained rulers” (Zembaty 1988: 543). Further, in what amounts to “an interesting reversal of one of the strands in Greek thinking about the morality of lying, it is the noblest and the freest for whom it is fitting to lie” (Zembaty 1988: 543). The freest person of all, the philosopher ruler with knowledge of the Forms, is the only person who may lie, on Plato’s alternative morality of lying.

2.9 ARISTOTLE AND THE LOVER OF TRUTH

Early on in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle mentions three virtues that are “concerned with association in conversations and actions” (Aristotle 1985: 47–8). Virtues, for Aristotle, are mean or intermediate states of character between excessive and deficient states of character. About the first of these virtues, truthfulness, Aristotle says: “In truth-telling, then, let us call the intermediate person truthful, and the mean truthfulness; pretence that overstates will be boastfulness, and the person who has it boastful; pretence that understates will be self-deprecation, and the person who has it self-deprecating” (Aristotle 1985: 48). Truthfulness, therefore, is a virtue that is an intermediate or mean state of character between the vice that is the excessively truthful state of character (boastfulness) and the vice that is the deficiently truthful state of character (self-deprecatingness).

When Aristotle discusses the truthful person and being truthful later in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he makes it clear that he is not discussing “someone who is truthful in agreements and in matters of justice and injustice” (Aristotle 1985: 11). A person who is truthful in agreements and matters of justice (justice is the whole of virtue in relation

¹⁰ Xenophon’s example of a general lying to troops when they are “disheartened” (Xenophon 1990: 183) is a possible case of this.

¹¹ As Raphael Woolf points out, “How exactly those who lose out in the rigged lotteries are supposed to benefit is unclear,” but Plato “is justifying the falsehood by reference to those who are told” (Woolf 2009: 25).

to others and preserve the political community truthful both in what he says simply because that character seems truthful when agreed upon when nothing is at stake (Aristotle 1985: 111). In respect to talking about truthfulness in what he says, belittling or exaggerating is praiseworthy and “truthful” and “truthful”

By contrast, Aristotle tells of falsehood and lying in the same category which, Aristotle says, their excesses or deficiencies (Zembaty 1993: 21). Lying, and he does not

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Certain lies, according to Aristotle (1985: 111). These lies are charges against others (Zembaty 1993: 9). Such lies to an unfair gain of glory or other individual suffering burden” (Zembaty 1993: 9). These lies are unjust and shameful of themselves in acts that are detrimental. Furthermore, those who sort out of a fixed distribution are unjust rather than lies, therefore, should

The boastful person (Aristotle 1985: 111). Not all boasters have an “ulterior” motive gain: “Boasters who

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to others and prescribed by correct laws, both written and unwritten, for the good of the political community) is a just person. Aristotle's concern is with someone "who is truthful both in what he says and in how he lives, when nothing about justice is at stake, simply because that is the state of his character" (Aristotle 1985: 11). Someone who is truthful when agreements or justice are not at stake is a lover of truth: "Someone with this character seems to be a decent person. For a lover of the truth who is truthful even when nothing is at stake will be still keener to tell the truth when something is at stake" (Aristotle 1985: 111). A lover of truth avoids lying "in itself" (Aristotle 1985: 111). With respect to talking about himself and his qualities, the lover of truth is "straightforward, truthful in what he says and does, since he acknowledges the qualities he has without belittling or exaggerating" (Aristotle 1985: 110). The truth, Aristotle says, "is fine and praiseworthy" and "the truthful person . . . is praiseworthy" (Aristotle 1985: 110).

By contrast, Aristotle says that "in itself, falsehood is base and blameworthy," and "the tellers of falsehood are blameworthy" (Aristotle 1985: 110). This might seem to place lying in the same category as "adultery, theft, murder," and other actions the names of which, Aristotle says, "automatically include baseness" because "they themselves, not their excesses or deficiencies, are base" (Aristotle 1985: 45) and which are "always wrong" (Zembyat 1993: 21). However, Aristotle makes distinctions between different kinds of lies, and he does not hold that lying is always base or wrong.

2.10 ARISTOTLE AND SHAMEFUL LIES

Certain lies, according to Aristotle, are lies told "when something is at stake" (Aristotle 1985: 111). These lies would include "false oaths, perjury, slander, and bringing false charges against others as well as lies which are part of dishonest business dealings" (Zembyat 1993: 9). Such lies are unjust lies. Their "badness lies in their serving as a means to an unfair gain of goods or an unfair diminution of burdens," at "the same time that another individual suffers a concomitant unfair loss of goods or an unfair increase in some burden" (Zembyat 1993: 9, 10). Hence, "the specific moral badness of those lies which are instances of injustice does not consist simply in their being lies" (Zembyat 1993: 10). These lies are unjust lies, and as a result they are "shameful" (Aristotle 1985: 111). The shamefulness of these unjust lies stems from "motives and character defects that result in acts that are detrimental to the well-being of the community" (Zembyat 1993: 10). Furthermore, those "whose character is such that they deliberately use lies of various sorts out of a fixed disposition characterized by pleasure in gain should be correctly described as unjust rather than as liars" (Zembyat 1993: 10). People who tell these unjust lies, therefore, should be characterized as unjust people rather than as liars.

The boastful person "appears to be opposed to the truthful person" (Aristotle 1985: 111). Not all boastful people have the same motivation, however. Boasters who have an "ulterior" motive tell lies about themselves for reputation or for monetary gain: "Boasters who aim at reputation, then, claim the qualities that win praise or win

congratulation for happiness. Boasters who aim at profit claim the qualities that gratify other people and that allow someone to avoid detection when he claims to be what he is not, e.g., a wise diviner or doctor" (Aristotle 1985: 111). Boasters who lie about themselves "for money or for means to making money" are more "disgraceful," or shameful, and are to be blamed more, than boasters who lie about themselves "for reputation or honour" (Aristotle 1985: 111). However, both types of boasters are telling lies "whose aim is some unfair share of honors or financial gain" (Zembaty 1993: 17). Hence, "the badness of these boasters would seem to consist in their being unjust rather than in their being boasters" (Zembaty 1993: 13). That is, boasters who lie about themselves for monetary gain or even just for reputation would appear to be unjust: "the badness of these boasters would seem to consist in their being unjust rather than in their being boasters" (Zembaty 1993: 13). Hence, their lies are also shameful, "at least in part, for consequentialist reasons" (Zembaty 1993: 12).

2.11 ARISTOTLE AND THE LOVERS OF LIES

There is also the boaster who does not have an ulterior motive for telling lies about himself. This is the boaster who tells lies "because he enjoys telling falsehoods in itself" (Aristotle 1985: 111). Such a boaster is a lover of lies. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle says that a liar is someone "who readily and by deliberate choice gives false accounts, not because of something else but because of itself" (Aristotle 1971: 95). Such a lover of lies claims qualities "when he either lacks them altogether or has less than he claims" (Aristotle 1985: 110). This boaster's lies "seem to fall into the nonshameful category" (Zembaty 1993: 13). Such lies Aristotle nevertheless considers to be base. The "baseness of lies does not lie simply in their consequences" (Zembaty 1993: 15).

The person who tells such a nonshameful but base lie would appear to be a bad person: "If someone claims to have more than he has, with no ulterior purpose, he certainly looks as though he is a base person, since otherwise he would not enjoy telling falsehoods" (Aristotle 1985: 111). However, Aristotle says that "apparently he is pointlessly foolish rather than bad" (Aristotle 1985: 111). These lies "do not issue in behavior which in any direct or obvious way is harmful to others or to the *polis*" (Zembaty 1993: 14). Hence, "the individual who boasts may not be bad even though the act is base" (Zembaty 1993: 14). These lies "are treated as less reprehensible than those of other boasters since their regular use seems to be insufficient to justify labeling the foolish boaster bad" (Zembaty 1993: 14).

The merely foolish lover of lies is potentially harmful only to himself, since he risks being exposed as a "lover of lies," and he may forfeit "the trust which is essential to friendship which, in turn, is essential to human well-being or happiness" (Zembaty 1988: 115). This kind of liar "takes enjoyment in doing something which is apparently trivial but which potentially has very grave consequences" (Zembaty 1988: 16) for him. His lies, while base, are not shameful, and his "enjoyment in lying may not qualify as

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a "moral" fault, but it certainly shows some kind of lack of sense" (Zembaty 1993: 15). Although he is not bad, he chooses to do "what is said to be base in itself" (Zembaty 1993: 15), that is, to lie. This "would seem, to indicate a serious character flaw, even though the foolish boaster's love of lying manifests itself only in lies about himself, which are potentially harmful only to him insofar as he risks having his pretensions exposed" and hence reducing his "well-being or happiness" (Zembaty 1993: 15, 16).

Boasters are not the only lovers of lies, according to Aristotle. There are also self-deprecators. The "self-deprecator" is the liar who "denies or belittles his actual qualities" (Aristotle 1985: 110). Not all self-deprecation is the same. Some self-deprecators "disavow small and obvious qualities" (Aristotle 1985: 112). These self-deprecators are worse than other self-deprecators, and are more similar to boasters: they "are called humbugs, and are more readily despised; sometimes, indeed, this even appears a form of boastfulness, as the Spartans' dress does—for the extreme deficiency, as well as the excess, is boastful" (Aristotle 1985: 112). However, those self-deprecators "who are moderate in their self-deprecation and confine themselves to qualities that are not too commonplace or obvious appear sophisticated" (Aristotle 1985: 112). These self-deprecators "seem to be avoiding bombast, not looking for profit, in what they say; and the qualities that win reputation are the ones that these people especially disavow, as Socrates also used to do" (Aristotle 1985: 112).

2.12 ARISTOTLE AND THE LIES OF THE MAGNANIMOUS PERSON

Self-deprecators are not the only people who tell self-deprecating lies, according to Aristotle. The person who has the virtue of magnanimity also tells self-deprecating lies. As Aristotle says about him: "Moreover, he must be open in his hatreds and his friendships, since concealment is proper to a frightened person. He is concerned for the truth more than for people's opinion. He is open in his speech and actions, since his disdain makes him speak freely. And he speaks the truth, except to the many" (to whom he does not tell the truth) but "not because he is self-deprecating" but because he is a magnanimous person (Aristotle 1985: 102). Indeed, when Aristotle discusses the truthful person, the lover of truth, he says that "He inclines to tell less, rather than more, than the truth; for this appears more suitable, since excesses are oppressive" (Aristotle 1985: 111). Although Aristotle "does not explicitly label the magnanimous person's self-deprecating statements lies" and although it is possible that "Aristotle would not consider the magnanimous person's falsehoods lies" (Zembaty 1993: 22–3), because the motivation is not the love of lies, it is not incorrect to label these less-than-truthful statements lies. Since Aristotle "sees self-deprecating lying as appropriate behavior for the magnanimous person, their self-deprecating lies cannot fall in the shameful category" (Zembaty 1993: 18), since magnanimous people cannot engage in shameful acts.

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Indeed, since magnanimous people “never choose to do anything base, even if it would not be shameful” to perform the action, it follows that a “self-deprecating lie told by a good person to the ‘right people’ (the many) for the ‘right reason’ is not base” (Zembaty 1993: 18), as well as not being shameful.

The magnanimous person does not tell self-deprecating lies for monetary gain, or out of fear of any harm that could be done to him, or out of a desire for the approval of others. Hence, “some lies about oneself are neither base nor reprehensible because they do not stem from some base or foolish motive but exemplify the virtuous individual’s freedom from some of the needs, desires, or passions that result in shameful and base actions” (Zembaty 1993: 20). Here, Aristotle “advances an example of someone whose independence is consistent with, and perhaps even demands, lying” (Zembaty 1993: 21). The magnanimous man is an example of a “case where self-respect would be lessened if one insisted on being completely truthful” (Zembaty 1993: 21).

2.13 ARISTOTLE AND LIES THAT ARE NOT BASE

There are at least two kinds of lies that, it seems, Aristotle does not consider to be base, or wrong. First, as Zembaty has pointed out, in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle “expresses the Greek view that lying to others toward whom one lacks good will is consistent with being a good individual and that one is expected to have that attitude toward enemies” (Zembaty 1993: 25 n. 36). Although he does not mention it in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, therefore, it seems that Aristotle does not consider lies told to enemies to be base, or wrong. Second, Aristotle does not consider lies told by the magnanimous person to “the many” about his possession of admirable qualities to be base, or wrong.

If Aristotle holds that some lies are not base, or wrong, then his claims that “in itself, falsehood is base and blameworthy,” and that “the tellers of falsehood are blameworthy,” stand in need of interpretation. It is possible to interpret his claim that “in itself, falsehood is base and blameworthy” as “no more than the claim that lies are normally such when considered without regard to attendant circumstances” (Zembaty 1993: 23). Aristotle’s claim can be interpreted as one “similar to the contemporary view which maintains that lies have an initial negative weight because in the absence of special considerations, truth is preferable to lies” (Zembaty 1993: 24), or the view that lying is *prima facie* wrong (see Mahon, forthcoming). In general, it is possible to interpret his claim as the claim lies are base and blameworthy except when “(a) the lie is primarily self-regarding and harms no-one and (b) telling the truth is an indication of some weakness rather than excellence of character” (Zembaty 1993: 24). Although the only lies in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that have been shown to be not base are the magnanimous person’s lies about his possession of admirable qualities, it can be argued that Aristotle should find morally acceptable any lie that is “a necessary means to some good end, harms no

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one and is rooted in excellence of character and sound thinking rather than in badness of character and foolishness" (Zembaty 1993: 25-6). A possible example would be "a lie told by a physician, relative, or friend in order to get the deceived person to submit to treatment or to take a medicinal drug which is needed to restore health but which the latter would otherwise reject," although it is true that "Aristotle never uses this example" (Zembaty 1993: 27). Such a lie:

might be seen as conditionally good when (1) one's ability to correctly evaluate the situation and thereby make the right choices in relation to one's own wished-for ends is detrimentally affected by illness; (2) the lie is necessary to regain an important natural good which is among one's wished-for ends; and (3) the loss of the good could adversely affect one's future ability to make rational choices as well as prevent or hinder a great deal of virtuous activity.

(Zembaty 1993: 28)

According to Zembaty, "it seems as if Aristotle would agree that at least some benevolently motivated lies are nonreprehensible insofar as they are instrumental in restoring the deceived person's possession of a good essential to continuing self-sufficiency and virtuous activity" (Zembaty 1993: 28). Such non-reprehensible lies, if they are indeed such, would be examples of "weak or soft paternalism" (Zembaty 1993: 28), and would not include cases of lying to people simply in order to save them pain.

Even if Aristotle considered certain lies to be not base, such as lies told to enemies, and self-deprecating lies told to "the many" by the magnanimous person, as well as, perhaps, some benevolently motivated lies, his views on the morality of lying were not as permissive as that of the ordinary morality of ancient Greece. Among the three ancient Greek philosophers, however, his views were closest to the ordinary morality of ancient Greece when it came to lying.

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