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# LYING

## A Minor Inquiry into the Ethics of Neurotic and Psychopathic Behavior

Ben Karpman

In this study, the author, Chief Psychiatrist in St. Elizabeth's Hospital, discusses lying as a particular form of human behavior, its relation to honesty, and its general position in our present culture, which apparently makes lying an integral part of our life. The general thesis is that lying is not a willful, consciously originated form of behavior, but is a product of repression and is unconsciously motivated. He then considers lying as it bears on the professions of law and medicine, showing points in common and points in difference. The study is completed by the consideration of the various psychopathological aspects of lying.

By special arrangement, this study is published simultaneously in the current number of *New York Psychiatric Quarterly*. Although entirely independent, it is in fact an introduction to another study "From the Autobiography of a Liar" also to appear in a subsequent number of the *New York Psychiatric Quarterly*.—EDITOR.

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The quest for the true, the good, and the beautiful has from time immemorial provided the strongest incentives in the life of mankind. Different cultures, different epochs have placed varied emphases on these which explain different standards; as for instance, Greek culture, which stressed aesthetics, and the Oriental culture, which regards honor as more important than honesty. Our own modern culture emphasizes more strongly the good *vs.* the evil, rather than knowledge *vs.* ignorance and the beautiful *vs.* the ugly. The good is our cultural imperative and is the backbone of the socio-economic, political and legal systems. The sole test of sanity *vs.* insanity is today not in terms of superior or inferior intelligence, but in terms of knowing the difference between right and wrong, essentially a contrast in values. Quite universally, all religions, be they monotheistic like Judaeo-Christian systems, the Buddhist-Shinto system, the polytheistic religions, and many others, are all oriented in one direction, that of goodness. The Bible speaks with condemnation of wicked lips and lying tongues. Guilt would not have played such a tremendous role in our life but for the fact that man, the perfectionist, falls short of the ideal of goodness and virtue that has been set for him. Throughout, honesty, goodness and virtue are presented to us as the *sum-mum bonum humanitatis*, as well as the best means for survival, while lying, in its many varieties and types, is represented as most reprehensible, and the core of all human vices. In philosophy, ethics occupies a more important position than either epistemology or aesthetics. Whether man is inherently good (Bishop Berkeley) or acquires the knowledge of it through experience (Locke), is still a favorite topic for discussion at

philosophical tables. Social movements base their incentives on social values and virtues, however they may clothe them with knowledge and reason.

How thoroughly the idea of ethics has permeated our life is seen in the fact that quite universally criminals try to find justifications, however gossamer, for their behavior, which they recognize as anti-social though it is true that their attitude toward truth is only too often verbal and that they pay only lip service to guilt. And what, after all, is a lie but an attempt on the part of an individual to appear in a more favorable light to make him seem more honest or better than he actually is, thus again making basic honesty and goodness the chief criterion in his life?

—2—

Withal, lying permeates our daily life, personal and social; however it may be disguised by the thin veneer of social convention. How many people are honest with themselves, let alone with others? The use of cosmetic articles by women, regarded but a few centuries ago as a crime, because used for the purpose of deceiving man, is now an accepted mode of behavior; a woman feels that she is exhibitionistic if she does not use rouge or lipstick whereas, in point of fact, it is the very opposite. We all try to put our best foot forward, win friends and influence people, and are not too careful about the means employed. One shudders to think what sort of life ours would be if every one of us were completely and entirely truthful. In our daily pastimes, such as card games, we attempt to deceive our partners into wrong playing by "poker" face or otherwise making misleading moves. Can one picture what sort of interpersonal relationship would be established if Mrs. Jones told Mrs. Brown just exactly what she thinks of her, and Mrs. Brown returned the compliment? How many automobiles could a salesman sell if he told the prospective buyer all the mechanical faults of his automobile while at the same time admitting the undoubted superiorities of his competitors' products? How many lawyers in defending a particular client are willing to tell the judge and jury the unvarnished truth as they actually know it, or fail to exaggerate the beneficial aspects of the case, appealing for the most part to the emotions of the jury rather than to reason? How many district attorneys, set to win a case and secure a conviction, do not equally go the limit in order to create prejudices in the minds of the jury? Our huge advertising system is based on deceptions and gross misrepresentations, as is also propaganda of various sorts, not excepting the power-

ful pressure groups and lobbies where all efforts are insincere attempts to cover up selfish interests. What would be his chances for re-election if every political aspirant were to tell his constituents, openly and frankly, his undoubted limitations, moral and ethical? When the late President Harding was being nominated for the office by the Republican party and was asked the usual question: "Do you know of anything that would disqualify you for the office?"—his answer was in the negative. Yet his life history shows him to have carried on a clandestine affair, the discovery of which later so shocked the moral sensibilities of the American people that had it been known at that time it would have certainly disqualified him from the office.

Grafting and bribery are an almost acceptable part of our municipal, state and other governments, and go on daily under our very nose to the passive acquiescence of the citizenry, which now and then is shocked out of its complacency by such public scandals as the Fall Teapot Dome, the Garsson Brothers, May munition exposure, and the like. On such occasions a great and spectacular trial is held, punitive sentences are meted out; the public conscience is appeased but the matter soon quiets down, and the merry business goes on again. It is almost an accepted tradition in our political life that there is no sense in running for office unless one takes advantage of the opportunity to make a little extra money on the side. The late Boss Murphy, little appreciating the low character of politicians' ethics, neatly divided illicit income into honest graft and dirty money.

In his "The Conventional Lies of Civilization", Max Nordau tells us of some of the wholesale lying and cheating that goes on in our social life; there is enough material accumulated by this time to enlarge the scope of his volume to many times its size and still leave much untold. International relations, from diplomacy down (and up) are filled with misrepresentations, evasions, and deceptions of the greatest kind. The League of Nations fell apart not because of external difficulties but because of internal contradictions, because each member came with his own bag of tricks and a pack of lies, each nation filled with its own hostilities and impossible ambitions and a total unwillingness to understand anyone else. The spectacle is being repeated to date with the U.N. How else can it be with Soviet Russia grabbing everything within her sight, by means mainly foul rather than fair, disclaiming any responsibility for her overt communistic activities but instead pleading that she is constantly being discriminated against by others? What are we to think of Britain, who votes with others for partition of Pales-

tine, yet in the same breath manipulates behind the scenes, and arms the Arabs against the Jews? Perfidy is too mild a name for this. What shall one say of history of which it has been stated that it is but a pack of lies agreed upon? Within the memory of many of us is the character of propaganda that goes on during a war; and some years later come the revealing books; "Now it Can be Told"; the Memoirs of such and such a statesman, etc. Propaganda not merely deceives, but whips and drives people into action desired by power and pressure groups.

Besides obvious forms of lying, there are many vicarious forms of it expressed in deceptions, cheating, mental reservations, simulations, frauds and falsehoods of all sorts, moderately tolerated by our society, until one passes to the grosser forms that are legally criminal, but qualitatively indistinguishable from civil lying that commonly obtains in the interpersonal relations.<sup>1</sup> Truly it is no paradox that the greatest expression of honesty is obtained among the insane.

—3—

Paradoxically enough, our mode of living not only allows for, but actually creates many situations which make lying absolutely necessary if people are to get along socially. The cultural imperative is to repress the basically true and to express the socially desirable even if untrue. Our primitive urges, if uncontrolled and uninhibited, would not have allowed the formation of a social order that would be self-sustaining. Our primitive impulses unless socially conditioned, would not have allowed us to get in contact with our fellow men. Our loves, if unconstrained, would interfere with the love trends of other people. Our basic hostility, if uncontrolled or unmodified, would not have allowed the survival of our opponents. Society has required that man give up some of his primitive impulses if he is to derive any benefit from social intercourse. Our whole system of ethics and morals is built on that basis, and precisely because of that we have to resort to a great deal of lying.

Politeness, no doubt, is a form of hypocrisy. What we would like to tell the people we come in contact with, and what we actually tell them, are two entirely different things. By the time

<sup>1</sup> The number of synonyms for "truth" is small, but those relating to lying may well fill several pages in the dictionary. To-wit: affectation, bluff, buffoonery, cant, casuistry, canard, cheating, concealing, conniving, counterfeit, deception, dishonesty, dissimulation, distortions, distrust, double cross, double face, double dealing, exaggeration, faking, fallacy, fabrication, falsehood, feigning, fraud, humbug, hypocrisy, impersonation, malingering, misrepresentation, perfidy, pretension, simulation, sophistry, tricking, understatement, untruthfulness, etc., etc.

our original expression emerges to the surface, it has been already modified by our censorship. The social ethics required lying. We do not tell a man his faults, even if we are painfully aware of them, but we suppress our criticism and offer something that is benign. There is also a good reason for it in the fact that unless we act that way toward our neighbors, they may equally well not act that way toward us. Therefore, "Love thy neighbor as thyself" may be not only a noble principle to follow, but a healthy and practical one as well, for if we can manage to approximate our love of our neighbor as our own, we have a right to hope that he will do the same thing toward us, thus giving us a better sense of security.

Pinocchio, it is related, would frequently tell lies and every time he told a lie his nose would grow bigger until it got so big it began to curl upon itself and develop many branches on itself. There was but one way in which to get his nose back into normal shape, and that was to stop lying, which he did, and happy he was indeed. But having done away with lying, he began to play hookey from school, whereupon his ears began to grow longer. That was very uncomfortable and annoying as well for it gave conspicuous evidence of his bad behavior. There was but one thing to do, to stop lying, playing hookey or tricks and then, and then only, would he appear normal, the moral being that in order to appear normal in the eyes of society, one must keep away from lying and tricks.

At worst, or at best, lying comes out modified in the form of mild insinuations which are a considerable compromise from the original. Our humor and wit are sadistically colored.

Lying as such did not, of course, come into play until man learned to express himself verbally. It need not be supposed, however, that man began to lie that split second (or is it split millenium?) when he turned from quadruped into biped. Lying as a form of human expression has a long and colorful history. Giorgiade<sup>2</sup> develops the theme that "the lie, while of biological origin, has taken on the characteristics of magic when it passed through the mind of prehistoric man. Prehistoric man evolved from the stage of visual and spatial images to that of mimical and vocal expression; later he developed the capacity of abstraction from immediate reality and, through the medium of language, to interiorize thought (imperceptible vocalization), thus guarding self-interest actions from his fellow-man. After acquiring language, the magical power of images was substituted

<sup>2</sup> Giorgiade, C. *Magio as the Origin of Lying and the Genesis of Thought*. Psychological Abstracts, Vol. 15, 1941. Abstr. No. 948.

by verbal magic. For primitive man the reproducing of objects through laryngo-oral images was equivalent to manipulation of real objects. Verbal magic resulted from this illusion. This in turn led to lying in order to escape from difficulties."

One might add here that lying goes beyond the pre-historic man. Deception or deceptive acting (mute lying) is not unknown in the animal world as in the well-known instance of death feigning in opossum, protective coloration in birds, etc.

—4—

In his essay "The Decay of Lying", Oscar Wilde, the supreme aesthete of all time, argued eloquently and brilliantly for the beautiful against the true and spoke of lying as an art, an expression of superior imaginative power. "A story", he says, "if too true is robbed of its reality and is thus entirely inartistic. We must emphasize the poetical side, imagination and unattainable ideals." In substance his thesis is that the essence of lying is exaggeration, a gift which if properly nurtured might grow into something really great. It is opposed to accuracy, which is fatal to imagination. We must cultivate the wit to exaggerate and the genius for romance. Modern fiction, he believes, is commonplace because it is so close to reality. The cultured and fascinating liar should be the leader of our society. The true founder of social intercourse is the primitive man who invented phantastic tales of victories that never took place. The aim of the liar is simply to charm, to delight, to give pleasure. Lying for the sake of the improvement of the young is the basis of home education. "The only form of lying", continues Wilde, "that is absolutely beyond reproach is lying for its own sake and its highest development is lying in art. Those who do not love beauty more than truth never know the inmost shrine of art. In the lost art of lying, birds sing of beautiful and impossible things, of things that are lovely and that never happened, of things that are not and that should not be. The proper aim of art is lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things. Art is not necessarily realistic nor spiritual. All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature and elevating them into ideals. Art must not surrender its imaginative medium. Art is independent of time. Any century is a suitable subject for art except our own. The only beautiful things are the things that do not concern us."

We shall not argue with a genius whose writings are so beautiful even if not true. It is clear, however, that Wilde views lying in the exceptional rather than the accepted meaning of the term.

In daily, normal life we are acquainted with many and different forms of lying but we may distinguish chiefly two: The harmless, innocent lying (the white lie) which is regarded as benign because it satisfies some personal need in the individual without doing anyone any injury. It may even do another person good. Quite universally, it is a defense against real or fancied inferiority. It is not encouraged socially, because it is feared that the too frequent use of it may lead to the more malignant form. The second form is the malignant type of lying, the purpose of which is the deriving of some personal benefit at the expense of someone else. This may range from relatively harmless and minor forms to the extreme one where one's life may be threatened. Such lying is not condoned for it threatens our security.

—5—

Mankind has been kinder to its liars and falsifiers than it has been to its thinkers and truth seekers. In the well known saying "Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne", one gets an explicit expression of the situation. Witness the glorification that we have accorded to dictators, to the Borgias and Richelieus, the Hitlers and Mussolinis, and contrast this with the attitude toward Socrates, Christ, the martyr-saints, John Huse and Savonarola, John Brown and Ghandi, all lovers of mankind, rare souls who were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for the courage of their convictions. Blood had to be shed by rebellious minorities rising against the tyranny of a foreign power to secure what is morally due them; the slaves who rose in arms against their masters, the abolitionists who years in advance saw the need of absolute freedom as a condition of progress and had to make so many sacrifices to secure what was their inalienable right against the entrenched wrong.

And yet one is tempted to make a plea for the liar and a defense of him. Often enough he is no more responsible for his lying than a neurotic in general is responsible for his symptoms, for lying has all the earmarks of a neurotic symptom and, like all neurotic symptoms, it does not appear and maintain itself in isolation but is intimately tied up with many other symptoms. Through an unwitting concatenation of circumstances in the making of which he had no hand, the liar often finds himself in situations which immediately threaten his security and from which he finds himself unable to escape except by lying; it is as if the environment in which he functions demands lying on his part as a condition of survival. Inevitably, of course, one lie leads to another and still other lies, and these in turn, lead to deceptions,



falsifications and cheating of all sorts. Why another person in a like situation would not resort to lying but would instead insist on telling the whole truth depends entirely upon the background, the nature of his repressions and the strength of his Super Ego. The famous Sam Johnson when asked what he considered the greatest virtues, answered: "Courage, for if one has courage he can practice all other virtues". Physical courage (bravery) is the ability to go on in face of danger and at the risk of one's life and limb. The loss of life in war time, tragic as it may otherwise be, carries with it the compensation of having sacrificed oneself for a country, and the possibility of immortality, and this provides a strong stimulus for action. Greater yet, however, is moral courage, for it requires the ability and willingness to sacrifice much of what one has against the tide of popular opposition; with the possibility of much loss and little gain. Most people, however, would rather lie out of a situation than courageously face it.

—6—

There are two professions chiefly, law and medicine, with perhaps the clerical between them, that are directly concerned with the problem of lying. Law deals primarily with the relationship between the individual and the community, always with predominant, if not exclusive, regard for the interests of the community and but little for the needs of the individual. By long, hard and, one might say, painful experience, society has learned what is the best it can do to promote the growth and maintain the welfare of the community, and it has crystallized these experiences into law. Law, therefore, depends a great deal on traditions and established precedents which through generations have become so rigid and so structuralized as to have lost the emotional significance which they undoubtedly had originally; for, cold and objective as laws appear to us, they were at the time of their origin intensely personal and represented emotional problems which the group had to solve if it was not to suffer damage from its individual members. The original attitude of man toward other human beings is not entirely one of positive social sentiments; there is a great deal in him of the isolate, who wishes nothing better than to escape contact with others. Sexual needs and perhaps his basic feeling of insecurity drive him to seek the cooperation of other human beings and this is responsible for what has come to be known as social sentiment. To secure such cooperation, he must perforce curb his aggression and sacrifice some of his personal desires. This he does not do readily or

willingly and the community is obliged constantly to put restraints on its members if it is not to suffer from their aggression. Through the medium of family training, and later through the influence of the school, the church and the community, the growing child develops a conscience and a sense of guilt, a ready obedience to dictates of culture (duty), and a willingness to sacrifice his personal needs for the larger interests of the community. While this training succeeds in most cases, its failure in others produces the anti-social and criminal elements of society.

It is at this point that lying comes in as a problem in law. In order that law may justly and properly evaluate the share of responsibility of the individual in the instance of an offense; in order that it may be sure that society will be protected and not suffer damage—and it quite universally gives society the larger benefit of the doubt—the law must have all the facts of the case, plain, unvarnished, unequivocal. It cannot afford, therefore, to admit lies. So concerned is society about lying that, not trusting the honesty and integrity of the defendant and the witnesses, it makes them take an oath, which is binding and the violation of which, being perjury, becomes a legal offense.

In contrast, medicine as a profession, and its practice by the physician, is built entirely around the individual patient. To relieve pain, to alleviate suffering, to offer surcease for distress and sorrow, to provide the greatest comfort possible—this is the essential work of the physician. The ethics of the profession therefore demand that the welfare of the patient be its foremost and greatest consideration; indeed, the only consideration. Accordingly, the physician will not regard truth as an absolute goal and lying as an evil *per se*, but will consider them only to the extent that they affect the individual patient. He will give the neurotic patient a placebo, knowing full well that it is a gross deception, but justifying himself by the consideration that: (a) it will give the patient a much needed rest and sleep—which is most important; (b) that if an opiate, barbiturate or other sleeping medicine were given, it might well lead, in susceptible individuals, to addiction—a medical evil. If a patient has an incurable disease, and if he is of the stoical type that can “take it,” it may be well enough to tell him the truth so that he can prepare himself accordingly. But most people are not stoical and the knowledge of the truth, by adding an emotional burden to the already existing physical one, may only hasten the end of life. Is it worth while, then, to sacrifice a patient for the sake of an abstract truth? The

physician is dedicated to prolonging life. In the physician-patient relationship he will lie to the patient, assuring him that there is still hope, and thus provide a moral force that can prolong life, even if only for a few hours. He will feed him with large doses of narcotics if this will relieve agony and prolong life; and, even as he is dying, he will put small pieces of ice between his lips to relieve the distress of the last hours.

Thus in a large sense the viewpoints of the profession of law and medicine are indeed opposite. The view of the law is social and communal; its interest in the individual member of society is secondary and remote. Built on hard and established precedents, law finds it difficult to break traditions and pave new ways. Law is conservative, not in a derogatory sense, but certainly in the sense that it wishes to preserve what has long been established and found socially useful. Medicine, on the other hand, is entirely individualistic. It is not directly concerned with social needs, even when it works socially, as in the field of public health; even when it looks upon society as a sick body, the attitude and the approach are essentially individualistic.

Situations, however, may arise where the interests of the individual may well conflict with those of the law. John A. is a citizen in the community known for his supreme honesty and high integrity. He is asked to testify on some matter and is sworn to tell all the truth he knows. He finds, however, that if he were to do that, he would have to betray the earlier confidence of his friend, William B., which his conscience will not permit him to do. A conflict arises here between individual and social ethics, not always satisfactorily solved. A like situation may arise if a physician or a priest is asked to divulge the confidence given him professionally, and implicitly understood to remain confidential. If the physician or the priest be importuned to yield the information, many will consider it a betrayal of faith and trust, and in the end the whole thing may boomerang, if people, having lost faith, will cease giving professional men confidential information.

Opposite though the viewpoints of the two professions may be are they entirely irreconcilable? Can the twain ever meet on common ground? That, though not immediately feasible, would seem to be not impossible. To what extent medicine can afford to sacrifice its personal contact with the individual patient, is difficult to say. But this much is probably clear, that law will have to take greater cognizance of the criminal as an individual, perhaps think of the criminal as a patient to be

treated rather than punished. The physician feels that society has produced the criminal, who neither chose his parents nor the environment in which he was brought up.

Another reaction to lying and viewed differently by the respective professions of law and medicine, is the problem of guilt. The law recognizes personal guilt and in case of such guilt expects the individual to acknowledge it unequivocally. The law further assumes that man is a free and responsible agent and that, being thus free and responsible, punishment will act as a sure deterrent. The law, not being concerned with motives, is therefore not interested in what may have been the motive behind the individual's deed, which motive, if known, might help us to understand the nature of the guilt in relation to it. It is here that we observe a basic difference in the attitudes of the two professions. Medicine, in treating an illness, does not treat the symptoms, but the causes behind them; for it has long recognized that, however alike symptoms may be on the surface, they may well have widely different causations. To the psychiatrist, the behavior and the reaction are what symptoms are to the general medical man. He goes behind the particular deed, and wishes to ascertain the motive for it, for he realizes that a reaction itself is not important unless it be judged in the light of the underlying motivations; that the same reaction and the same behavior may have different motivations in different individuals, and therefore must be judged accordingly. In the study of this motivation, he may discover that the individual had particular personal reasons for indulging in the behavior or deed which, although not according with the accepted tenets of society, may nevertheless have been of particular importance to the individual. He may feel justified in lying about the situation and in regarding himself as innocent. May one add to the four freedoms, the freedom to lie? I understand that in some cultures (Oriental) lying is acceptable, honor being more important than honesty.

On the assumption that man is a free, responsible agent, the law feels justified in punishing, such punishment being presumed to act as a deterrent. It is, however, a historical fact that, for the most part, punishment has failed as a deterrent and precisely for the reason that law was not differential in its understanding of the offense, nor did it attempt to understand the motives behind the deed.

Thus, medicine, and psychiatry in particular, submits that man is far from being a free agent; and in support of this has brought forth weighty and abundant clinical material to demon-

strate that responsibility varies with the individual and with the deed, and that in many instances while the individual may be objectively guilty, there may have been a number of individual justifying factors which explain the situation. If the ultimate goal of society is its improvement, and law is an agent to promote it, obviously that goal must be achieved through the improvement of the individuals who compose society, and punishment is not always the direct method by which such improvement can be obtained. Indeed, there is much to point to the possibility that punishment administered without regard to the motivations behind the situation may do the very opposite of what is intended; that is, instead of being a deterrent, it may prove to be an incitement to further crimes. It is therefore doubtful whether the rehabilitation of criminals, which is desired by all, can really be achieved by the commonly accepted means unless the law is also willing to recognize and employ some of the newly discovered methods of science.

—7—

It would be a task to stagger a stout heart to attempt to classify lies, for in a sense lying is implicit in behavior of mankind in general. The following is merely a cursory attempt designed to cover the most general features:

1. Benign and Salutary forms of lying: a) Not to hurt the other party. b) To make another person comfortable. c) "What people don't know won't hurt them." d) "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." e) "Why should I destroy her illusions?" f) There is also such a thing as a "love of lying." We often hear the expression, "He would rather lie than tell the truth." The person thus referred to is generally regarded as a habitual liar, and it is generally believed that he takes a positive delight in lying for its own sake. But is there actually such a type, and if so, what is the motivating force in back of his deliberate falsification?
2. Hysterical—to attract attention, to make others feel sorry for him.
3. Defensive: a) To extricate one's self from a difficult situation. b) To account for misused time; to cover up thefts. Denying thefts. c) Fear of punishment—there is a form of lying which results from cowardice—the denial of having done something, springing from fear of embarrassing or punitive consequences. d) Feigning or malingering. Simulation of disease by deception for the purpose of gaining certain personal advantages.
4. Compensatory: a) To impress people with one's importance. b) To pretend for one's self greater achievements. c) To cover up feelings of inferiority. d) To excel another liar's story. e) "Keeping-up-with-the-Joneses" motive—the lies of social pretension. This is generally "defensive and compensatory" but certainly not

unconscious. Allied to this is the lying from shame—"I wouldn't want her to know how poor we are," etc. This is "defensive" but hardly "compensatory" and certainly not unconscious.

5. Malicious—To deceive for profit. There is the calculated, scheming lying of the typical dramatic "villain"—Iago in *Othello*; Edmund in *King Lear*; Uriah Heep in *David Copperfield*.
6. Gossiping—maliciously exaggerating thin rumors or inventing the same for the purpose of hurting a specific person and deriving personal satisfaction from such gossip. Aspersions and insinuations belong to the same group. These are often motivated by strong personal emotional reasons such as hostility and jealousy.
7. Implied lying. This is a form of lying which consists of merely maintaining silence, of refraining from telling the truth rather than the actual telling of an untruth. It is more correctly called dissembling or dissimulation. A person may say, "I didn't tell you about this before, but—" and then proceed to confess some past action, the absence of your knowledge of which had led you to form an entirely different impression of his behavior than that which is now disclosed by his retarded admission of this or that reprehensible action.
8. Love intoxication type of lying—In all love relations, there is universally an "over-estimation of the sexual object." Nearly all love poetry is lying, in the sense of idealistic exaggeration.  
     "I wonder who's kissing her now.  
     I wonder who's teaching her how.  
     I wonder who's looking into her eyes,  
     Breathing sighs, telling lies!"
9. Pathologic lying as observed in malingering retrospective falsifications, phantasy and delusional elaboration; perhaps amnesic states, etc.

—8—

Perhaps the most insidious, even dangerous, form of lying is self-deception, and the greatest harm done here is to the individual himself. It is far more prevalent than is ordinarily supposed. In its milder forms it appears as "kidding oneself", talking oneself into believing that he is better or more accomplished than he actually is. It isn't lack of insight, but unwillingness to use it, in order to spare the ego from unnecessary hurt. Further, we have the beguiling of one's self into beliefs which he recognizes as false, yet holds on to in spite of this because of their intense emotional appeal.

Some people, it seems, do not like their original selves but want to believe that they are different. They often seek to escape the consciousness of inferiority or defeat, and try to talk themselves into believing that they are better than they actually are. Sometimes they are successful to the point where they actually convince themselves of their fancied superiority or success and behave accordingly.

An unwillingness to admit defeat in achieving a certain objective will lead some people to develop a "sour grapes" attitude as a result of which they talk themselves into believing that they didn't want the thing to begin with or that it really wasn't worth striving for. Little boys who are too shy to meet little girls, will sometimes tell themselves that they really don't care for them at all, that in fact they hate them, preferring their books and studies, which even on the surface appears a palpable lie, easily seen by others though not by the subject. In adults this is strikingly evident in cases of refused love, where the rejected suitor suddenly falls in love with somebody else as if to prove to the first love that she was not at all important.

Where is the difference between an honest wish and a lie? If one forgets, or tries to forget, that which it is unpleasant to remember, is this wilful self-deception or a state of amnesia? Some people will not allow themselves to discuss sex, as if the subject did not exist. Is not this tacit lying?

Much has been said in psychoanalytic literature about repression. Repression may be successful or it may fail completely. It may only partially be successful; the individual may desperately strive to drive the memory of an unpleasant situation out of his mind, yet not succeed fully, the bitterness of the memory returning ever so often to the surface. However unwilling, he may be forced to face reality. But there is little doubt that the man is trying to hide the true situation from himself; that he is indulging in self-deception.

If one is willing to accept the idea of subconscious lying, he may go further and find that there may even be unconscious lying. Certainly rationalizations are deceptions, but deceptions practiced at the unconscious level.

—9—

From the standpoint of psychopathology, lying may properly be viewed as a memory disturbance. It is therefore desirable to correlate it with and differentiate it from other and grosser memory disturbances: Confabulations, Retrospective and other memory falsifications, states of amnesia, and hypermnesia, Pseudologia Phantastica, pathological lying, etc.

(a) *Confabulations* are the compensatory filling of memory gaps created by the damaging influence of an active, chiefly organic or toxic, psychosis. They are usually associated with Korsakow's psychosis but are found in general paresis, sterile dementias, and other psychotic states. Somewhere in his personality, though mainly in the unconscious, the individual

appreciates that his memory has suffered damage; that isolated events and sometimes even whole blocks of events have been blotted out; whereupon he proceeds to fill the existing memory lacunae by free invention. These fabrications and pseudo-remembrances, though occasionally becoming quite fixed, are as a rule very fleeting and unstable, changing not only from day to day but indeed from moment to moment, not to be repeated again but substituted by entirely different ones. Their volatility is evidenced by the fact that these patients can be guided, directed and re-directed by the observer into all sorts of channels. Yet throughout it all, one discerns a common denominator, a desperate attempt to cover up a most embarrassing life aspect. Because these confabulations endow phantasy with reality, yet have no perceptible connection with or basis in the reality of any actual experience, they may be termed memory hallucinations (Bleuler).

Not everyone who has this type of memory disturbance will resort to confabulations. It is indulged in by certain types of personalities too sensitive to face inferiority and who therefore are forever on the alert to build and erect compensatory defenses. The organic or toxic condition acts here merely as a precipitating factor, bringing to the surface those inadequacies and limitations which heretofore have been latent because the patient, still being normal, was able to repress adequately and prevent these from coming to the surface. With the onset of the disease process, the personality becomes insecure, repressions less effective, emotions more labile and mobile, with the gradual emergence of the heretofore existing limitations into the open and the consequent psychic need to dispose of them; hence confabulations which assume the character chiefly of compensatory reactions.

(b) *Retrospective Falsifications*: As if not satisfied with pathological distortion of present reality by means of delusions and hallucinations, the psychotic will often resort to including in the system events of the remote past, projecting his false beliefs even as far back as earliest childhood. Let us take a patient whose psychosis became overt at the age of 35. To the best available information, and to all appearances, he seemed entirely well at 30, 25, 20, etc. Yet by the time he came to our attention at 35, he gave an elaborate account of abnormal events going back to his childhood. Events are recalled that never happened (paramnesia), and for that matter never could happen. Single happenings are suddenly given a strange and mysterious explanation. And if these statements are not accepted,



the patient will cite in new material their support—an endless procedure if one ever tries to get to the bottom of it.

In neuroses, this behavior finds its parallel counterpart in phantasies of other than known parental origin, of being a changeling, etc.

(c) In hysterical *amnesia* one often observes that a whole set of events with a large but unpleasant emotional tone is driven out of consciousness. In the global type of amnesia, everything pertaining to the particular painful event (e.g. murder) is excluded from the conscious horizon (Katathymic Amnesia). To support this amnesia, the patient will either not fill the void at all, claiming that he just cannot recall the event, or else by means of delusions and hallucinations, support the entirely delusional idea that the event never took place. The actual event has been repressed and is kept repressed because the conscious mind finds it too painful to face the actual situation. In psychoses, states of delirium are often followed by amnesia, though the events themselves are not particularly important.

The amnesias need not necessarily be complete nor fixed. Ever so often the repressed event may appear on the surface, only to disappear again. Amnestic material sometimes reappears in dreams. Amnesias are not to be confused with other memory disturbances; disturbances in retention such as are found in organic and toxic psychoses; memory weakness, which may be genuine because structural, in organic psychoses, but entirely functional, even psychogenic, in schizophrenias.

(d) As contrasted oppositely with amnesias, we have *hyper-mnesias* in which certain events stand out or are recollected with particular clearness and vividness both as regards their general occurrence, as well as recollection of details ordinarily little noticed. We find this observed in dreams, hypnosis, delirious states, etc.

(e) *Pseudologia Phantastica* is (at the conscious level) a seemingly purposeless prodigious compensatory falsification that does not appear opportunistic or defensive but is rather compulsive in character and is not accompanied by a pleasant reaction. It stands by itself as a special trend in the personality of the particular individual, though it may be tied up with other abnormal mental states, to wit psychoses, and particularly neuroses. There is first of all in pseudologia phantastica a most pressing need to indulge in extravagant castle-building to make up for a reality that appears to the patient to be too prosaic. Undisturbed, these patients live in a dream world.

Nevertheless, even with a prodigious and vivid utilization of exuberant phantasy weaving, generated by unconscious forces, the pseudologue is not entirely unaware of the fact that the whole thing is a fabrication, pure and simple. This is not at all true of confabulations, states of paramnesia and retrospective falsifications. Confronted by facts and events which contradict their phantasy, the pseudologue will readily admit the true situation. In the manner of the hysteric, of which he is but a subtype, and who, though blind, yet may see when necessary, the pseudologue is still in touch with reality. The pseudologue may be regarded as the functional psychic parallel of the confabulant. He differs from the confabulant, whose memory gap is organic, in that his basic memory is structurally intact but memories are freely invented to satisfy pressing psychological needs. Further, where confabulations are built on memory defects, and paramnesias follow amnesia or other memory disturbances, in pseudologia phantastica the free invention is indulged in entirely to satisfy specific psychological needs.

In a sense, Pseudologia Phantastica may be viewed as verbally *expressed* day dreams and, as in day dreams, the patients half believe their own fanciful tales. Theirs is an unusually rich imagination prodded into active expression by acutely felt psychic needs. They recite socially exalted backgrounds which provide glamour for which they seem to feel a strong need, or will recite sad tales calculated to arouse great pity. It is an expression of a particular type of neurosis, and a study of their life history reveals the presence of other trends indicative of neurotic make-up: marked egocentricity, high suggestibility, unreliability, a pathological need for self-assertion, a precocious sex life (masturbation and perverse trends) and marked emotional conflicts about these. How, for instance, is one to interpret false accusations of incest by a girl against her father and/or brother (Healy's Case No. 16) except as inverted wishes on the same level with hysterical fancies of violations and rape?

They have little or no insight into true behavior, or into the harm they may cause others. They are all glib talkers, really artists at fabrication, and their recital gives a strong impression of verisimilitude. Characteristically, as noted by Healy, they show a remarkable aptitude of language. They are good conversationalists and are good at composition.

According to Healy<sup>3</sup> Pseudologia Phantastica is a type of delinquency and leads to false accusations and swindling, and

<sup>3</sup> Healy, W. H. and Healy, M. T. *Pathological Lying, Accusations and Swindling*. Little, Brown & Co., 1915.

is therefore important from the standpoint of forensic psychiatry. Thus cases should be separated and differentiated from purposeful lying that is within the limits of the normal. Such false accusations as may be purposeful and indulged in because of vindictiveness, grudge-formation, or as a means of getting out of difficulties, or which disguise undesirable truths, are not, according to Healy, related to Pseudologia Phantastica.

(f) *Pathological Lying*: From the group Pseudologia Phantastica it is desirable to split off as a separate entity, pathological lying. Unlike Pseudologia Phantastica, it is not compensatory or wish fulfilling in character but entirely defensive: (a) to cover undesirable facts and events that will not stand well the light of day, (b) to protect or safeguard a difficult situation, (c) to avenge a hurt, the individual going almost recklessly to no end of lying in order to satisfy a hostile feeling. Unlike Pseudologia Phantastica, it is of a more conscious, more deliberate nature, although the need for resorting to it stems from the deeper resources of the personality. The pathological liar may also want to provide a nicer background in place of one that is sordid, substitute a different event for one he would prefer not to admit; but in contrast to the pseudologue this is done in greater moderation and quite within the limits of reality. It is probably identical with the term chronic prevaricator which Healy regards as falling within the limits of the normal but which, in our view, is definitely abnormal.

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To the psychiatrist, lying is of particular importance, for he meets it daily in his work, whether in its direct and unblushing form or in the form of unwitting evasions or rationalizations. How is he to deal with such material? Is he to accept the statements of the patient at their face value or give them only limited credence; and how is he to define this limited credence? What is he to take and what is he to discard? Is he to keep on questioning the individual who is so obviously falsifying the truth or inventing situations that never existed? This may be an endless procedure, for in the case of an expert liar this can only mean more lies heaped upon many previous ones.

As a rule, the truthfulness of the psychotics can be relied upon. The praecox usually will not lie. Though he may appear to be evasive, this is perchance caused by memory or association disturbances. He may be telling what appears to be an untruth, whereas in reality it is only a symbol which, if properly desymbolized, may well be the truth. He may be asked how he feels,

and although he is obviously depressed or apathetic, he may answer that he feels quite well. This, however, rather than being an untruth, is more an expression of disharmony of mood, a clinical symptom rather far removed from lying.

The manic in an elated stage, because of his volubility and exuberance, may exaggerate or minimize the real truth of situations, but this could hardly be called a lie. The paranoiac may give expression to many delusional ideas and retrospective falsifications, but these have long passed the stage of conventional truth distortion and have assumed entirely the aspect of delusional psychotic elaborations.

It is with the neurotic and the psychopath that we are likely to have most trouble in this respect. Unlike the psychotic, the neurotic is in too close touch with reality and, while he may be deeply absorbed in phantasy, he knows somewhere, even if it be only from the corner of his eye or the fringe of consciousness, how much of what he says is true and how much of it is false. When he is put in a position of defense he will not hesitate to lie, but most of it may well be benign lying, a defensive or compensatory feature of his neurosis. He may resort to more malignant lying, however, when his behavior is motivated by hostility or other antipathic emotions, in which case, swayed entirely by these emotions, he is likely to lie in order to satisfy the hostility. Malicious gossiping is perhaps a good instance of this. He may be involved in numerous difficult situations from which he may want to escape, in which case his lying may assume a definitely psychopathic character.

But it is in the case of the psychopath that the psychiatrist has the greatest difficulty with lying, and nowhere is it found more frequently than in prisons. Securing information from an imprisoned psychopath presents many difficulties; by and large he has been in trouble all his life and there is much that he would like to hide or defend and much that he would like to escape. He wishes to escape the consequences of his deeds, including punishment, not only because, like any human being, he does not like restrictions of any nature, but because he is so absolutely lacking in any sense of guilt that he does not consider himself wrong; therefore, he feels fully justified in telling all sorts of lies in order to escape the consequences of his past behavior. It is a most difficult task to obtain any true information of value in the case history of a psychopath. Even when confronted with reliable corroborative information from other sources, he will persist in his original statement and will attempt to confound us with still more lies. Not only does he lie about

the existing situation which has gotten him into difficulties, but he is equally disposed to falsify his background in an attempt to create a favorable impression on the examiner. Such falsification may at times approach a Korsakow's.

Almost any inadequate and incompletely reacted to emotional state may lead to lying, but foremost among such states are feelings of inferiority, insecurity, unrequited love, hostility and, most of all perhaps, that great ubiquitous plague of mankind, guilt: especially unconscious guilt<sup>4</sup>. Guilt is probably the greatest emotional scourge of mankind. From cradle to grave it is at once creative and destructive, responsible alike for much in our loves and hates, our lies and truths, for ruthless aggression and most abject humility, for many murders and suicides, as well as for much of the normal and distorted human behavior. It is as much a cause of religion as it is behind atheism. Rather than a sequence guilt, certainly unconscious guilt, it may have been the prime force behind the origin of religion.

Yet since these same emotional states, including guilt, do not in other individuals under like circumstances lead to lying, it must be concluded that in back of lying stands the liar, a particular type of personality that cannot face or accept reality, but must distort it to meet his special needs. In such personalities lying is motivated by specific psychological constellations, unconscious in character; it satisfies specific emotional needs which not only determine lying as an outlet, but likewise the type and content of such lying. The circumstances under which the individual lies; why one individual in the face of a difficult situation will resort to lying while another under like circumstances will stubbornly tell the truth and brave any untoward consequences, is again a matter of personalities. The intriguing question thus presented is: truth versus lying and reality versus phantasy. Of course, one is not necessarily a liar at all times. Many individuals—perhaps most individuals—may indulge in lying on some occasions while they are quite truthful on others.

Thus, every neurotic and every psychopath tells his own type of lies, a type which fits in with his background and personality. The lie that will fit one individual will not at all fit another and therefore cannot be used by another individual. Before the lie

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<sup>4</sup> It is extremely suggestive that although the problem of guilt plays a large part in neuroses and in the daily work of psychoanalysts, the literature on the subject is very meager. To be sure, many articles make passing mention of the subject and here and there one finds an article especially devoted to its discussion, but there are no books taking up the subject as a whole. I know of only one recent publication, namely Bergler's "The Battle of Conscience," that discusses the subject in an adequate and competent manner. In Saul's book, "Emotional Maturity," there is a nice and confidently written section on guilt.

is verbally expressed, the individual has at his disposal several other choices and the expression finally chosen is over-determined. In some cases it may well have undergone a transformation from the original, and the lie, therefore, may be a reaction formation, that is, a reversal of the original trend. In other words, free and uninhibited as lying may appear to be, it is basically well controlled by psychic processes of which the individual has no specific knowledge and over which he has no control. Because of these considerations, we must view lying as a product of unconscious mentation; and the unconscious does not lie. Hence, regardless of how clever the individual liar may be he unwittingly and unconsciously reveals himself through his lying. Like dreams and phantasies, to which they are closely related, lies have a structure of their own and a careful analysis of them should reveal clearly the man behind them.

If now the tenet be accepted that lies are products of repressions and are unconsciously motivated, it will now have to be granted that there is a most definite correlation between them and the life of the individual. The more we let the individual talk, the more likely he is to produce sufficient material which, even though it be in the form of lying, will somewhere definitely relate to the true situation. Indeed this is the very approach used universally in psychoanalysis. However honest a patient may be, he unwittingly indulges in all sorts of distortion which later the treatment is able to correct. Therefore, a psychiatrist oriented in a psychodynamic focus should have less difficulty in interpreting the meaning of lies in the life of the individual than the psychiatrist who works merely at the descriptive level. By a careful analysis of the lies the dynamic psychiatrist should be able to uncover much of the true situation and arrive at the dynamics of the very lies to which the individual has resorted.

### *Summary*

In our modern culture, honesty is considered as more important in human relations than either knowledge or beauty. Accordingly, lying, in its many varieties and types, is regarded as most reprehensible and the core of all human vices.

Withal, however it may be disguised by the thin veneer of social conventions, lying permeates our daily life, personal and social. Be it in interpersonal relations, relations between the sexes, professional, commercial, economic, political, national and international relations, our life is filled with lies and deceptions; and the line dividing this from antisocial and criminal reactions is often a very thin one. Indeed, lying may be regarded as

integral to honesty and essential to it as a necessary complement.

Our mode of living not only allows for, but actually creates many situations, which make lying absolutely necessary if people are to get along socially. Our cultural imperative is to repress the basically true and to express the socially desirable even if untrue; for our primitive urges, if uncontrolled and uninhibited, would not have allowed the formation of a well functioning social order. To-wit, politeness, which is so important in our interpersonal relations, yet is undoubtedly a form related to lying.

Lying has a long and colorful human history going to the belief in magic in the prehistoric man. It goes even beyond that for deceptions are not unknown in the animal world (death feigning in the opossum, protective coloration in birds, etc.).

Like other forms of human behavior, lying is not entirely conscious, or deliberate. In its more overt form, it has all the earmarks of a neurotic symptom, a part of the general neurotic constellation. It is often resorted to as a defense against feelings of insecurity and inferiority.

Lies are products of repression and are unconsciously motivated. The consideration of lying as such is meaningless unless one recognizes the motivation behind lying. Lies are differential; they are psychological reactions that are highly specific for each individual.

The interests of the two professions, law and medicine, are in a large measure contiguous, though the view points are often opposite and this appears clearly in consideration of lying. Our early training of the child has for its purpose the development of a conscience and a sense of guilt, a ready obedience to dictates of culture (duty). While this training succeeds in most cases, it fails in others resulting in anti-social and criminal behavior. It is here that law steps in, in principle condemning lying as inimical to the establishment of truth and demanding truth and nothing but the truth. On the other hand, medicine concerned primarily with the welfare of the individual patient, cannot regard truth as an absolute goal and lying as an evil per se, but only considers these to the extent they affect the individual patient.

In yet another situation, law and medicine appear to conflict. The law recognizes only the deed, not the motivation behind the deed. It further recognizes personal guilt, free will and personal responsibility, which it expects the individual to acknowledge freely and unequivocally, exacting a punishment as a sure deterrent. Medicine, on the other hand, recognizes etiology development and pathology behind the symptoms displayed. In doing

so, the psychiatrist may uncover some deep-seated reasons behind a man's lying, reasons which may have their full justification in the light of the individual's life history, to be understood rather than condemned. Nor can psychiatry view man entirely as a free agent, fully responsible for his behavior.

In general terms, lies may be classified as benign and malicious; hysterical, defensive, and compensatory; gossiping, implied lying, lying in love relations, and pathologically. A most insidious form of lying is self-deception which is most often subconscious. Certain deceptions are practiced at the unconscious level, e. g. rationalizations.

From the standpoint of psychopathology, lying may properly be viewed as a memory disturbance and therefore has relation to such reactions as confabulations, retrospective falsifications, amnesic states, *pseudologia phantastica* and pathological lying.

To the psychiatrist, the consideration of lying is of importance in the study and treatment of patients. Psychotics as a rule do not lie. The *praecox* will not lie, however evasive he may be; unwitting falsifications may occur because of memory and association disturbances. The manic individual may suppress the truth or exaggerate the real situation depending upon the mental stage. The retrospective falsifications of the *paranoid* are as unconscious as are confabulations and amnesias. Neurotics may lie defensively or compensatorily or for reasons of hostility. But it is the true *psycopath* that is the liar *par excellence*, because his life is full of misdeeds and grosser anti-social and criminal behavior against the discovery of which he protects himself by lying. He often lies beyond the need of the situation and lying sometimes assumes the character of psychological lying.