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Lying, Accuracy, and Credence

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Traditional definitions of lying involve at least two necessary conditions: a speaker lies only if she (i) asserts that *p* and (ii) believes that *p* is false. Given a full-belief framework, an adequate account of lying should distinguish mere insincerity (asserting what you don't believe) from lying (asserting what you believe to be false). An account of lying in terms of a credence-accuracy framework rather than the traditional full-belief framework also ought to distinguish these layers. For we find it worse, and objectionably so, for a speaker to assert a proposition which she regards as highly likely to be false, than to assert one in which she has middling credence of, say, 0.5; and we find the latter worse than asserting a proposition in which one has high credence.

Sam Fox Krauss (2017) offers a credence-accuracy account of lying, and seeks to jettison the traditionalist's belief requirement (ii) in favour of a condition concerning expected inaccuracy. Krauss's argument depends on the idea that the traditionalist's (ii), as well as another recent credence account of lying,[1] fails to explain nearby cases as lies: 'If the belief requirement is correct, then there are nearby cases of non-lies in which the speaker is blameworthy for the same reason as the liar, albeit to a lesser degree, without lying' (2017: 729–30). To motivate this, Krauss invites us to compare the blameworthiness of asserting with full belief that what one asserts is false, to cases of doing so with mere middling credence:

> The speaker's assertion that it won't rain when she has 0.6 credence that it will, and an assertion that it won't rain when she *believes* that it will, differ only by the magnitude of risk imposition, and, therefore, the speaker's blameworthiness. If this is the

[1] Marsili's (2014) scalar definition of lying, which Krauss likewise faults for improperly distinguishing nearby cases. Marsili's own (ii), a 'comparative insincerity condition,' reads: 'S believes *p* more likely to be false than true' (2014: 162ff.).

> case, it's hard to see why *lying* picks out any special phenomenon. (2017: 730)

For Krauss, the belief requirement is problematic because given it, 'lies are not interestingly distinct from nearby cases' (2017: 731). However, I shall show that Krauss's own account suffers from an identical drawback of being unable to explain nearby cases; even worse, it fails to distinguish between cases of telling lies from cases of telling the *truth*.

Krauss locates the blameworthiness of lying not in believing that what one says is false, but rather in the 'expected epistemic damage' to the hearer: where credences can be scored as more or less accurate given their 'closeness' to the truth, expected epistemic damage is the expected 'increase in inaccuracy' which 'the liar expects the dupe to suffer' by trusting the speaker (2017: 728). Thus Krauss's two necessary conditions[2] on lying are (a) S says that p, and (b) S fulfills the *worse-off requirement*,

> WORSE-OFF: The expected epistemic damage to the audience, with respect to p, by the speaker's lights, conditional on the audience trusting her with respect to p, at all, is greater than 0. (2017: 731)

In other words, 'it's a necessary condition on lying that the speaker think that, if the dupe trusts her, the dupe will be worse off, epistemically' (2017: 731). Krauss proposes that (b) can do what the traditionalist's (ii) cannot: classify as lies not only cases of asserting $\neg p$ when one outright believes p, but *also* nearby cases, like his motivating case, of asserting that $\neg p$ with 0.6 credence in p. Because Krauss thinks that the latter kind of case should also count as lying and that WORSE-OFF captures what makes all lies blameworthy, he urges that it replace the traditionalist's full-belief requirement (ii).

Let us set aside the issue of how to relate credences to full belief, and let us grant to Krauss that lying should extend to a credence framework. Still, there are three major problems even on his own terms. First, WORSE-OFF is not a necessary condition on lying, for there are lies which fail to fulfill it:

> **Case 1**: A's credence in p is 1, B's in p is 0 (and 1 in $\neg p$), and A knows this. A asserts to B that $\neg p$.

[2] Krauss remains neutral on whether it also requires a third intent-to-deceive condition.

In Case 1, A is maximally certain that what A asserts is false, so A's assertion is intuitively a lie. But A doesn't fulfill WORSE-OFF because A doesn't expect an increase in B's inaccuracy with respect to p conditional on B's trusting[3] A: for A has asserted a proposition of which B is certain.

Second, as we've seen, the fault Krauss lays at the traditionalist's door is that (ii) cannot properly classify nearby cases. Yet Krauss's own account improperly distinguishes nearby cases: compare Case 1 above with

> **Case 2**: A's credence in p is 1, B's in p is 0.1 (and 0.9 in $\neg p$), and A knows this. A asserts to B that $\neg p$; and A expects this to raise, even slightly, B's credence in $\neg p$.

From A's perspective, B is expected to suffer some epistemic damage in Case 2, but not in Case 1. So Krauss would deem Case 2, but not Case 1, a lie: this is due solely to B's slightly different credence in each case, permitting different expectations of how B would respond, conditional on B's trusting A's utterance. But in each case, A has the same high confidence that the asserted p is false, and intuitively both cases are lies if either of them is. Thus, Krauss's account distinguishes two nearby cases that should be given the same diagnosis.

Third, Krauss's account gets wrong some cases of telling the truth:

> **Case 3**: A's credence in p is 0.8, B's is 0.8 in p, and A knows this. A asserts to B that p; and A expects this to raise, even slightly, B's credence in p.

Now Krauss doesn't fully defend (a) and (b) as jointly sufficient conditions,[4] so he is not committed to counting Case 3 as a lie. Yet even if not, a problem remains because for Krauss, WORSE-OFF provides the story about the blameworthiness of lying. But given that story, one can also be just as blameworthy,

[3] Might Krauss object that B couldn't count as *trusting* A if B does not increase B's credence in what A asserts? Perhaps, but that notion of trust seems implausible, for one can trust another by being ready to believe whatever they are about to say. It would be odd to go from trusting someone before they assert to not trusting them once they do so, simply because one was already certain of what they assert.

[4] Though Krauss comes close by acknowledging that those who reject an intent-to-deceive condition could think of (a) and (b) together sufficient for lying (2017: 731).

and for the exact same reasons, when telling the truth. For if A expects B to suffer the same increase of inaccuracy in Case 3 as in Case 2, A would be just as blameworthy even though, in Case 3, A is trying to tell the truth. In this way, Krauss's account lumps together some cases that ought to be interestingly distinct.[5]

These problems suggest then that, rather than the traditionalist's definition of lying, it is Krauss's which is worse off.[6]

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[5] Krauss might favour adding an intent-to-deceive condition to (a) and (b), which would require that the speaker expects that the hearer will trust her and so expects to inflict increased inaccuracy, on the hearer, for the asserted proposition. But doing so would not help, for this account would still fail to classify Case 1 as a lie; improperly distinguish Case 2 as a lie from Case 1; and (counterintuitively) classify Case 3 as a lie. Note, by contrast, that Marsili's (2014) scalar definition of lying rightly counts Cases 1–2 as lies, and Case 3 as a non-lie.

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