

When is it morally acceptable to lie?

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Abstract. Kant thought that one should never lie. Modern philosophers disagree, admitting its acceptability in various situations. I argue that one would have to admit it in many more.

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In the kingdom of the blind

I told the lie

That I was the one with the one eye

Kant famously held the view that lying was always morally wrong (see Parfit 2011). Contemporary professional moral and political philosophers in the analytic tradition are, I believe, apt to respond by hammering the view over the head with extreme exceptions, metaphorically speaking, for example you can lie to save a Jew from a genocidal programme. Indeed, in that situation it is morally required that you lie (Parfit 2011: 293).

But there is a problem: if I have no practice in lying, I am unlikely to be a convincing liar if such a situation should arise. And so, unless it is somehow really unlikely in one's lifetime, one should be lying a lot more. I should be telling lies in various real life contexts, so that I get better at lying, in case I have to save a life by doing so. I should lie about who or what is in my house. But contemporary moral and political philosophers do not encourage lying outside very select contexts. I don't even have a house by the way, if that counts as a lie: obvious definition meet Strawson senior!

Reference

Parfit, D. 2011. *On What Matters, Volume 1*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.