

LIES AND DECEPTION: A FAILED RECONCILIATION

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ABSTRACT: The traditional view of lying says that lying is a matter of intending to deceive others by making statements that one believes to be false. Jennifer Lackey has recently defended the following version of the traditional view: A lies to B just in case (i) A states that p to B, (ii) A believes that p is false and (iii) A intends to be deceptive to B in stating that p . I argue that, despite all the virtues that Lackey ascribes to her view, conditions (i), (ii) and (iii) are not sufficient for lying.

KEYWORDS: lying, lies, deception, concealment, deceit

Jennifer Lackey¹ has recently defended a version of the traditionally held view of lying according to which A lies to B if and only if (1) A states that p to B, (2) A believes that p is false and (3) A intends to deceive B in stating that p . Lackey reviews some counterexamples to the necessity of (3), criticizes several alternative definitions that do not connect lying with deception, and concludes that, although the cases show that (3) is not necessary for lying, the connection between lying and deception has been dropped too quickly in the literature. To preserve that connection and thus keep the spirit of the traditional account, Lackey makes a slight modification to (3):

LIE-L: A lies to B if and only if (i) A states that p to B, (ii) A believes that p is false and (iii) A intends to be deceptive to B in stating that p .

According to Lackey, LIE-L has many virtues, such as that it delivers the correct result in the counterexamples to the traditional account, that it avoids all the problems that afflict rival views or that it distinguishes lying from irony, joking and acting. I will not dispute any of these points. Rather, my argument against LIE-L will be more straightforward: I will show that conditions (i), (ii) and (iii) are not jointly sufficient for lying. In other words, I will show that a subject might state that p , believe that p is false and intend to be deceptive in stating that p without her statement counting as a lie.

¹ Jennifer Lackey, "Lies and Deception: An Unhappy Divorce," *Analysis* 73, 2 (2013): 236-248.

1. Lackey's notion of being deceptive

What does it take for A to be deceptive to B regarding whether p ? Lackey gives no definition but she puts forward two sufficient conditions:

CONCEALMENT OF INFORMATION PRINCIPLE (CIP): If A aims to conceal information from B regarding whether p , then A is deceptive to B with respect to whether p .

DECEIT PRINCIPLE (DP): If A aims to bring about a false belief in B regarding whether p , then A is deceptive to B with respect to whether p .²

We can give the following working definition of 'being deceptive' using CIP and DP:

DECEPTIVE: A is deceptive to B with respect to whether p if and only if A aims to conceal information from B regarding whether p or A aims to bring about a false belief in B regarding whether p .

DECEPTIVE might need a few more disjuncts but it will suffice for our purposes. Given DECEPTIVE, condition (iii) of LIE-L (A *intends* to be deceptive to B in stating that p) can be read as follows: in stating that p , A *aims* to conceal information from B or A *aims* to bring about a false belief in B. Putting all the pieces together, LIE-L can be reformulated in the following way:

LIE-L: A lies to B if and only if (i) A states that p to B, (ii) A believes that p is false and (iii), in stating that p , A aims to conceal information from B or A aims to bring about a false belief in B.

2. Success conditions are not an option for Lackey

Why is Lackey interested in formulating condition (iii) in terms of *aiming* to conceal information or to bring about false belief rather than in terms of *succeeding* in concealing information or in bringing about false belief? The reason is that if Lackey included success conditions, her opponent could reject, for instance, her analysis of bald-faced lies. Cases of bald-faced lies are cases in which both A and B know that p and each know that the other knows that p and yet A states that not- p to B. Lackey gives an example in which a student is caught flagrantly cheating on an exam for the fourth time and tells the Dean 'I did not cheat on the exam' despite both know he cheated on the exam and despite they

² Lackey claims: "[N]otice that concealing information is sufficient, though not necessary, for being deceptive; thus, it is merely one instance of a more general phenomenon. Obviously, another way of being deceptive is to be deceitful, where one's aim is to bring about a false belief in one's hearer" (Lackey, "Lies and Deception," 6).

each know that the other knows this.³ If success conditions of the type <A conceals information from B regarding whether p > or <A brings about a false belief in B regarding whether p > were included in LIE-L, the definition would incorrectly rule out as cases of lying cases in which there is common knowledge of that which is being lied about. The reason is that A and B's common knowledge of p is inconsistent with A's succeeding in concealing the fact that p from B and with B's believing falsely that p . In brief, success conditions of that type are not an option for Lackey.

3. A counterexample to LIE-L

Consider the following case:

CHICAGO REDUX

Having just arrived at the train station in Chicago, B wishes to obtain directions to the Sears Tower, which is at location L1. She looks for a good informant and selects A, a person who looks like a police officer. However, A happens to be a person cleverly disguised as a police officer whose intention is to give wrong directions to outsiders. In addition, A has hidden all the evidence available at the train station that could show outsiders the location of Chicago landmarks (e.g., Chicago city maps, guides, info stands, etc.). It also happens that when A is about to state "The Sears Tower is at location L2," a benevolent Genie moves the building to L2 so that A speaks truly. Consequently, B's belief that the Sears Tower is at L2 is true.⁴

In CHICAGO REDUX, (i) A states that the Sears Tower is at location L2 to B, (ii) A believes that it is false that the Sears Tower is at location L2, (iii) A attempts to conceal information regarding the location of the Sears Tower from B and A attempts to bring about in B the false belief that the Sears Tower is at location L2. That is, conditions (i), (ii) and (iii) of LIE-L are satisfied. However, A's statement that the Sears Tower is at location L2 is not a lie in virtue of the following intuitive condition:

FALSITY: A lies to B in stating that p , only if p is false.

In fact, one of the key factors that differentiate lying from deception is precisely that lying requires making false statements while deception might arise from true statements.⁵ In addition, note that LIE-L could rule out CHICAGO REDUX

³ The example appears in Thomas L. Carson, *Lying and Deception: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁴ The case is a modification of an example that appears in Jennifer Lackey, "Why We Don't Deserve Credit for Everything We Know," *Synthese* 158, 3 (2007): 345-361.

⁵ Carson, *Lying and Deception*, section 2.III.1.

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as a case of lying if it included success conditions of the type <A conceals information from B regarding whether p > or <A brings about a false belief in B regarding whether p > (the latter would not hold). However, this is not an option for Lackey, as we have seen. Finally, note that CHICAGO REDUX is not an isolated philosophical fiction. There is a whole range of imaginable scenarios in which A states that p with the clear intention of lying to B but in which, unbeknownst to A, p is true in virtue of factors that go beyond her control and, therefore, given FALSITY, her statement that p is not a lie. To conclude, Lackey argues that the divorce between lies and deception should never have happened. I have shown that she has not succeeded in reconciling them.