

Wesleyan University

The Honors College

The Genealogy of Lying and Deception in Political Theory

by

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Class of 2012

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in Government

Middletown, Connecticut

April, 2012

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful for having been given the chance to write this thesis, and explore the topic of deception. I wish to thank Professor Chakravarti for her unwavering support throughout this process, as well as the rest of the faculty in the government department for their input and guidance. I would also like to thank my friend, James, for being a challenging and creative interlocutor who I could share my ideas with. I am also deeply grateful to my girlfriend, Linda, for her support and understanding. Most of all, I would like to thank my family for the encouragement and help they gave me every step of the way. This thesis is for them.

Introduction: Lies, Damned Lies, and Theories

Lies, deceit, falsehood, spinning, concealment, half-truths, lies of omission, noble lies, hypocrisy, white lies, lies for the sake of the truth, lies told to liars, bald-faced lying, management, self-deception, propaganda, and good manners are just a few of the names that are applied to activities involving deception today. The irony is that, despite our apparent understanding of how to classify and label forms of deceitful behavior, there is so little agreement about the permissibility and moral value of lying (let alone the highly contentious, semantic issue of how to define “lying”). It is one of the most pervasive and persistent practices in politics and society, yet the mere mention of lying can elicit a vehemently negative response. Political philosophers have attempted to offer guidance in these issues, and have produced a canon of well-known perspectives on lies and deceit, yet points of agreement seem few and far between. In modernity, many theorists either personally believe, or have observed the belief in others, that one ought to attribute an intrinsic negative weight to lying, yet recognize that the complete rejection of all lying is, at best, impractical. Just after the turn of the 20th century, Henry Sidgwick attempted an examination of several different perspectives on deception (relying very much on what he called “Common Sense”) in order to assess whether we might posit truthfulness as a duty.¹ He concluded that “the rule of Veracity, as commonly accepted, cannot be elevated into a definite moral axiom: for there is no real

¹ H. Sidgwick, “The Classification of Duties-- Veracity,” in *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* by Sissela Bok (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 273.

agreement as to how far we are bound to impart true beliefs to others.”² However, this uncertainty runs both ways for Sidgwick in the sense that there is “no self-evident secondary principle, clearly defining when it [honesty] is not to be exacted.”³ In other words, lying cannot clearly be described as objectively wrong, yet there are also no clear cases where one ought to be deceitful. Sidgwick went even further by suggesting that if we were to take this stance, it would lead to the question of “when and how far it is admissible” to use deception, which he believed we would only be able to answer on the basis of what is most efficacious in balancing the pursuit of possible gains with “the imperilment of mutual confidence involved in all violation of truth.”⁴ Essentially, the danger of losing confidence in one’s self and others would be ever-present should we all accept the conditional permissibility of deception.

Other philosophers today also choose to stress the anti-social nature of lies. Harry Frankfurt argues that “the victim of a lie is, in the degree of his deprivation of truth, shut off from the world of common experience and isolated in an illusory realm to which there is no path that others might find or follow.”⁵ He describes this phenomenon further when he writes, “part of the fault in lying is that the liar, by denying access to what is truly in or on his mind, forecloses an elementary and normally presumed mode of human intimacy.”⁶ However, if one is told a lie, whether

² H. Sidgwick, “The Classification of Duties-- Veracity,” 274-275.

³ H. Sidgwick, “The Classification of Duties-- Veracity,” 275.

⁴ H. Sidgwick, “The Classification of Duties-- Veracity,” 273.

⁵ Harry Frankfurt, “On Truth, Lies, and Bullshit,” in *The Philosophy of Deception*, ed. Clancy Martin (USA: Oxford UP. 2009) 38.

⁶ Harry Frankfurt, “On Truth, Lies, and Bullshit,” 42.

one is cut off from a “common experience” of the world would rely on whether the common experience of others is also predicated upon the same lie. For example, one might think of the lie many parents tell their children concerning Santa Claus and his continued existence. In this case, having been told the lie allows the child to join in on the common experience of others in their peer group, and allows him to revel in the excitement caused by the prospect of a large man fitting down a small chimney to give the child presents. Similarly, whether there is a “normally presumed mode of human intimacy” also seems to not take into account that there can be a normally presumed mode of intimacy based on deceit. For example, people in a relationship will frequently lie to each other about whether their hair is thinning, or whether a dress makes one of them look portly, in able to maintain a level of intimacy that would cease to exist if the harsh truth (i.e. that neither individual looks as good as they believe they do) were to come out.

Sissela Bok stresses how detrimental lies are to society as well, claiming that we must attach an initial negative weight to lies on the grounds that “trust in some degree of veracity functions as a *foundation* of relations among human beings; when this trust shatters or wears away, institutions collapse.”⁷ In further explanation of this point, Bok writes, “I can have different kinds of trust: that you will treat me fairly, that you will have my interests at heart, that you will do me no harm. But if I do not trust your word, can I have genuine trust in the first three?”⁸ Bok, in a similar manner

⁷ Sissela Bok, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 31.

⁸ Sissela Bok, *Lying: MCPPL*, *ibid.*

to Frankfurt, seems to take certain liberties with the assumptions she makes in her argument. Certainly, truthfulness, at least in terms of using language accurately so as to be understood, is a necessary pre-condition for societies, institutions, and trust. It would be hard to doubt that a degree of societal trust is also necessary to maintain our lives in a stable society. However, I would venture so far as to say that Bok does not put absolute trust (of any of the three kinds she mentions) in everyone she meets, let alone the majority of people one is likely to deal with on an impersonal, day-to-day, basis. Firstly, that a stranger is honest with you does not mean they have a lack of plans to hurt you, care about your interests, or intend to treat you fairly. Secondly, if one lies to someone, that does not mean that one has plans to hurt them, or ignore their interests, since one can lie out of a concern for others' interests. Also, a lie can be told in order to treat people fairly. For example, if an individual wants to spend a quiet night in, and a friend asks him out, he might lie and say "I am busy," but he might also tell the same lie to any other person who asks him to come out (rather than tell them the truth), since if it came back to his friend that he lied to him, and not others, his friend might see it as a personal slant against him (i.e. some friends will not be offended if one lies to them, providing one is consistent among friends in general). In the end, it seems that many theorists today are hostile to the notion that lies can and do serve social purposes that are not necessarily, or inherently, malevolent, but may actually be constructive and valuable.

Other theorists, such as Ian Leslie, go even further by arguing that it is impossible to do away with the broader category of deception in human behavior, due

to the fact that a tendency to deceive is engrained into our psychological constitutions in such a way that we could not possibly have a coherent experience of the world without it.⁹ Amidst all of this controversy, the questions still remain: what is the moral value of lying, if there is any, in ethical and political life? Is lying good, bad, evil, permissible, useful, necessary, or all of the above? Arguments exist for all of these options, as well as other alternatives, but it seems fair to suggest that our general understanding of deception has not progressed, or reached any telos. Theorists have been debating the permissibility and the ethical nature of lies in light of questions pertaining to “the good,” and “the right way to act,” but relatively little attention has been given to the issue of how lying and deception can aid us in being authentic to ourselves. Essentially, what I wish to extract from the on-going debate, which is characteristic of our time (and the evolution of perspectives on lying in general) is the potential for the lie to serve life and, perhaps, some sense of how the lie could be considered an ethical tool.

In the same vein as Friedrich Nietzsche who wrote his genealogy of morals possessing the firm belief that “the *value* of morality” was at stake,¹⁰ I have recognized that the *value* of lying is at stake. I shall argue that lying is not an inherently bad or evil practice. Rather, it can affirm life (which I define as a process by which we create, apply and maintain meaning and value for our actions and lives under the right circumstances) by supporting necessary preconditions such as a stable

⁹ Ian Leslie, *Born Liars*, (Canada: Anansi Press Inc. 2011), 172.

¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. and ed. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) 19.

society and government for the affirmation of life. More specifically, lying can serve political life by supporting a stable society and government, which are in turn necessary for the establishment and evolution of culture, conceived (in Nietzschean terms) as a collective process aimed at the affirmation of life via practices of value creation. By value creation, I mean creating and applying concepts to things to lend meaning and worth to them, which individuals can then accept in order to lend value and purpose to their lives, or reject in favor of creating their own values. Essentially, this perspective considers the focus of government to be more than just a protector of rights, property, or any other assets. Rather, I suggest that government can, and ought to, be an instrument for securing purpose and value for the lives of citizens by either offering them meaning for life, or by allowing citizens to create their own. This perspective is, in spirit, similar to the ancient Greek notion of the purpose of the state, yet my stance differs from that of the Greeks in that it embraces an appreciation for the pluralistic societies we find in western liberal democracies that is not found in the ancients' homogenous moral and political value system.

The manner in which I have chosen to conduct my project is by constructing a genealogy. A genealogy used to refer to the tracing of one's family origins that noblemen would often take part in to prove the legitimacy of their hereditary line. Later on in the 19th century, the notion of a "genealogy" was further applied to concepts as well as other living beings in order to better understand them (e.g. Darwin's thoughts concerning the origins of different species). I intend on pursuing my inquiry into lies and deceit in political and moral theory by writing my own

interpretation of a Nietzschean genealogy. Bernard Williams, who I am very much influenced and inspired by, arguably created his own interpretation of a Nietzschean genealogy in his book *Truth and Truthfulness*. There, he defines a genealogy as “a narrative that tries to explain a cultural phenomenon by describing a way in which it came about, or could have come about, or might be imagined to have come about.”¹¹ Williams argues that a genealogy is not just a historical account, as it also leaves room for a fictional narrative that can ascribe functional roles to phenomena that were originally thought of as not possessing a function, and can also serve the purpose of explaining these functions in the context of a simplified, primitive setting (e.g. the notion of a “state of nature” has often been used to discuss phenomena such as the existence of governments and state legitimacy).¹² In this way, fiction may be used to serve and, perhaps, produce a greater truth. My genealogy will posit an imaginary origin of lying in a similar manner to that which Bernard Williams discusses, but I must distinguish the aim of my genealogy from his. I am not ascribing a function to a phenomenon that has been thought of as without function, because lying has already had so many uses attributed to it. Rather, I am trying to assign a new function to lying so as to introduce a different understanding of this complex activity. This will be established in my discussion of what I call the “third option hypothesis,” which is essentially my vision of how lying came into use by our early human ancestors.

Along with this, I have developed five criteria to guide the development of my genealogy, partially influenced by what others (such as Foucault and Williams) have

¹¹ Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002), 20.

¹² Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, 32.

said, but largely inspired by my own reading of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*. Each criterion represents a reason why I chose to utilize this method instead of a purely historical, teleological, apathetic, dialectical, or a dry method of analysis. While I cannot claim to be writing a "true" Nietzschean genealogy, my own interpretation of his method at least shares four things in common with his work, which are: 1) It will not be a teleological, or dialectical account of the current moral status of lying and deceit, and it will not justify this moral status, 2) It will track the evolution of the concepts of lying and deceit from their murky origins in history to its even murkier place in contemporary moral thought, 3) It will not be value-neutral or lacking in normative content, and finally, 4) I will utilize the analytical perspectives of several disciplines (notably history, political theory, and moral philosophy) in order to better understand the evolution of philosophical perspectives on lying. In adhering to these stipulations, I hope to provide my readers with a comprehensive appreciation of the present quagmire of lies and deceit and, perhaps, to contribute something to the ideas I am examining.

An objection against my project could be raised on the grounds that part of the reason I have chosen to use a personalized version of the genealogical method is that I am, to some degree, assuming one of the things that I am attempting to explain which is that the progression of theoretical perspectives on lying has been an anti-teleological one. A genealogy is well known to be suited for giving an anti-teleological account, and I admit that this is the type of account I am discussing. This being said, we must ask if it is fair to assume an anti-teleological stance without

having proved it yet, and we must also examine what exactly it means to describe the progression of perspectives on deceit as anti-teleological. In regards to the first question, I am assuming the anti-teleological perspective in the same way that a scientist might assume a hypothesis in order to more efficiently direct his inquiries, while also intending to test the hypothesis. This is not to say that my writing will be value-neutral, or impartial; rather, I am merely assuming this position in order to have a starting point. Concerning the second question, we might first ask: what would it mean if these perspectives had moved towards a telos? What would that higher point be? One could argue that a reasonable telos for a theory is to be able to better, or more completely, account for certain phenomena in relation to a given subject. We might call this the interpretative value of a theory, but theories in political philosophy do not just exist for the purpose of providing clarity. Arguably, a theory also exists for the purpose of offering guidance, or direction, towards a better course of action. In this way, the normative value of a theory is established. Hence, to say that the evolution of perspectives on a given subject has developed in a teleological manner is to say that there is a current understanding of that subject that is better able to account for the numerous and nuanced ways in which the subject may manifest itself (and has manifested itself in the past), and may also offer better guidance for our actions than previously proposed theories. The thought that we more fully understand the technical and ethical complexities of lying and deception today than in the past is precisely the position I am rejecting. There is just as much (if not more) confusion and moral ambiguity surrounding these concepts, and while we have labeled and categorized

different ways to lie (or not lie), we are arguably no better off. In this sense, the evolution of perspectives has been “anti-teleological.”

I will be relying heavily on the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche to argue for the value of deception. My first chapter will deal exclusively with Nietzsche’s work, along with different perspectives on how we might attempt to understand his arguments. He (among others) had come to question the notions of ethical and political truth that had been proposed in the past, and arguably created a theory that encouraged this aggressively questioning attitude, yet ultimately quenched it. While Nietzsche attacked moral values, and different notions of truth (especially the concept of “objective” truth), I will show that he did not entirely reject them; rather, he provided a space for the possibility of truth and morals in his theory. Nietzsche was by no means what he wanted man to avoid becoming (a nihilist), and he used all of his creative powers to lay the groundwork for a new way of appreciating the concepts of truth and morality, namely in reference to the notion of whether they serve or affirm life. Crucially, this chapter is meant to assess the meaning of "affirming life," and it is meant to articulate a way in which one could consider society and the politics that are associated with it as being predicated upon deception. I also try to stress that it is within society that man is made capable of collectively pursuing and creating meaning such that the lives of community members need not suffer from a nihilistic rejection of life. However, the danger of lying in politics is also assessed, and it is revealed that lying, when left in the hands of one ruler or party, can lead to tyranny and instability (e.g. lies that are ill-considered, or thoughtless in regards to the well-

being of society, may lead to wars, invasion of liberties, as well as a personal loss of meaning of life for individual citizens). Hence, I offer the principle that the responsibility of crafting and disseminating lies ought never to fall in the hands of one person or group. Essentially, there must (preferably at a higher level of government) be deliberation among mixed perspectives concerning the issues of whether it is better to tell the truth in a particular case and, if a lie is deemed better, what lie ought to be told to maintain the conditions for meaning and value creation. I will also present my own view (a perspective I have come to call the “third option hypothesis”) concerning how our ability to deceive developed, and out of what needs this human capacity may find its origin. My hypothesis is essentially an imaginative narrative that takes place in the state of nature that explains the existence of lying as the result of a survival mechanism that developed in response to early man’s movement into society.

In my second chapter, I show that a perspective that embraces lying as an ethical and political tool for the creation and maintenance of value in the lives of citizens was possible at one time; notably, in ancient Greek political philosophy. For the Greeks (especially Plato) the psychological and moral well-being of citizens was a key responsibility of the government and, to this end, they thought lying was permissible at times. However, Plato's perspective, along with his notion of the noble lie, are then critiqued from a Nietzschean standpoint to reveal a potential danger that Plato's perspective could pose to the affirmation of life (namely, that Plato's ideal state would not allow for the evolution of culture and values, since the values the state are based on are set, and are meant to be maintained at the cost of attempts to challenge

old values and express new, and potentially better values). Hence, I try to stress that if a society or political system attempts to inspire, or motivate their people through a lie, or mythologized past, they must allow for those lies to be questioned and potentially rejected in a free public forum (which necessitates certain rights that liberal democracies today value such as freedom of speech, assembly, and press), thus allowing for values and norms to evolve and space to be made for new values that may allow citizens to live fuller lives. Naturally, conflicting opinions were born in response to this moral dichotomy. Some of these views came from religious perspectives (as in Judaism), whereas Greek philosophy spawned some of its own opponents, notably Aristotle. In the course of this chapter, it will be revealed that a distrust of lying in general came to prominence in the world of ethical and political thought. Jews and Christians were told that God would punish liars, and Aristotle questioned the degree to which lying could be used for the sake of the good. Arguably, the moral flexibility and capacity for free thought of the ancient Greeks presented too much of a challenge for some, and it had moved in one direction only to be reined in and diverted to a different and extreme path: absolutism (or the absolute rejection of all lying). St Augustine would be the first to adequately articulate the absolutist perspective in his *Contra Mendacium*, signaling the subjugation of philosophy at the hands of theology.

However, the narrow and constraining perspectives on deceit proposed by the Judeo-Christians were not to last long. In my third chapter, I attempt to show that the absolutist perspective of the Christians (the perspective that rejected the more open-

minded, and potentially life-serving view of the ancient Greeks on lying), through the work of Thomas Aquinas, may have given rise to a new approach to viewing political life and lying as a practice within it. With the rise of political realism and secular-positivism, the focus of politics shifted from maintaining the moral and psychological well-being of citizens (and the values they live by), to the maintenance of political power and stability for as long a duration as possible (which was central in the works of Machiavelli and Hobbes). Lying, in turn, was then justified as a useful political tool for sustaining political power. By examining the re-conceptualization of lying (for the Greeks it could be morally necessary and politically expedient, for the Christians it was morally prohibited) for purposes of merely maintaining power, I attempt to elucidate a crucial way in which lying serves life. Specifically, lying can be used to create the stability of society and the political state that is necessary for maintaining culture and values more generally. I then suggest that, while lying can facilitate social and political stability, the duration of a regime's power need not be a stable one, since lying can also create much instability if there are no checks against the will to lie of the ruler of the ruling party, other than a public forum where political lies can be challenged. I propose another crucial check against political lies is the ability of citizens to hold politicians accountable when their lies harm the people or destabilize society (either by voting, trial, or impeachment for example). Again, this accountability may also be exemplified by certain practices that we find in liberal democracy today.

The movement toward secular truth and free inquiry would lead naturally into the Enlightenment. In my fourth chapter, (in contrast to my previous chapters where I mostly focus on how lying factors into the relationship between rulers and citizens), I examine how individual citizens might attempt to justify lying on a more personal basis. Justifications for lying, aside from political expediency, or moral necessity, will be discussed in relation to the different views on the human faculties that were taken up in the Enlightenment (specifically in the works of David Hume, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant). Earlier in the Enlightenment, attempts to justify lying in accordance with passions, moral sentiments, and conscience will be analyzed in order to show that, while appealing to non-rational human faculties may be dubious, they are somewhat inextricably linked to our value judgments. From a Nietzschean standpoint, they lend value and content to our actions, such that they actually appear worthy of being pursued. Then, I move to Immanuel Kant's embrace of rationalism, which again (in a similar manner to the Christians) attempted to cast lying as morally impermissible. I use Nietzsche to call Kant's arguments concerning the universality, and the possibility of pure practical reason into question so as to reveal that a purely rational approach is no more preferable than trying to justify one's moral decisions to lie according to pure passion or fancy. Despite this, I offer the principle that we can still assess which emotions or passions are worthy of motivating rationally conceived courses of action (viewing our judgments as a balancing act between passionate drives and reason which serves to mediate our temper), and this leaves open the

possibility of a further discourse within society and politics concerning ethics and which value judgments about lies can be more legitimized.

Finally, I will look to contemporary political theory to examine the current state of lying in political thought. Philosophers of our time (such as Hannah Arendt, and David Runciman) have mostly lived through an age of political pragmatism, where lies and deceit have been used to commit atrocities on a scale that was previously unimaginable, and have been recognized as commonplace in social, as well as political, life. I will argue that their works collectively help to constitute the modern intellectual understanding of lies and deceit, and may provide some guidance for the future place of lies in politics and ethics. Absolutist as well as pragmatic perspectives on deception still exist in conflict with one another today, and it seems that nearly every rule proposed to guide the moral use of lies has been brought into question to some degree. My aim in this chapter is to offer several principles (based on what the previous chapters reveal) for the purpose of guiding our use of lying in society and politics in a more progressive manner. I do not wish to offer these principles as measures for when it is right or permissible to lie, nor will my proposed maxims help to establish a definition of “the good.” Rather, I offer them as a way to maintain an acceptable quality of life in the social and political realms (which are rife with deceit that is well-intended, or malevolent, or both) that we find ourselves in. Ultimately I argue that we (those of us in liberal democratic regimes) already have several of the tools that are necessary in order to constructively deal with problems that arise from occurrences of political deception, yet we lack a certain perspective on

the relationship between citizens and their leaders that might be more conducive to a stable political state. So much blame and anger is inspired by petty instances of deception in politics, and these attitudes (inspired by an unwillingness to let go of out-lived moral constraints) divert the attention of citizens away from deceptive activities in politics that actually pose a threat to their lives and values. I will conclude with a discussion of what might be a preferable attitude towards lying in politics and society, given the capacity of deception to support the service of life in a political sense.

Chapter 1: Nietzsche and Lying In The Service of Life

Historically, many attempts to reconcile ourselves with our ability to use falsehoods have been expressed in Western political and moral philosophy. These attempts at reconciliation have largely been aimed at bridging a normative gap that exists between our knowledge that we can create and use falsehoods, and our lack of concrete knowledge concerning whether or when we ought to exercise this capacity. This gap has inspired many great minds to consider the issue in relation to varying normative perspectives and first principles (e.g. in relation to *eudaimonea*, justice, liberty, and duty to name a few), but I would argue that none came so close to articulating a coherent, and practical, system for understanding and debating the use of falsehood as the philosopher with perhaps the largest reputation for incoherency, Friedrich Nietzsche. Although one would be hard-pressed to argue that Nietzsche did create a moral framework through which different instances of deception could be evaluated, I would argue that such a framework could be extrapolated from his theories, especially those concerning the service, or affirmation, of life. "Life," for Nietzsche was a broad and, in some ways, ambiguous notion that arguably lay at the heart of his philosophical approach, yet there is a certain amount of value in having such a far-reaching central concern (not to imply that this concept can have a coherent system mechanistically constructed out of it) in his work. I maintain that we must use deception (along with all of our other capacities) to serve life and, furthermore, that this same intuitive proposition may also be amenable to, and inclusive of, the theories presented by past philosophers regarding the ethical permissibility of lying. By first

considering the numerous ways that Nietzsche believed life could be served, I will lay the groundwork for a genealogy of different perspectives on lies and deception within the disciplines of political and moral philosophy. While following the progression of these different perspectives, I will attempt to bring the voices of past theorists into discussion with the Nietzschean framework, and my own perspective (both of which will be established in this chapter), so as to lend further credence to the notion that lying in the service of life can incorporate many diverse ethical viewpoints. There will not be one answer to the question of when or whether it is right to lie, but it is my sincere aspiration to bring these answers together into one all-encompassing discussion in which concepts and values can be more easily related to one another (no matter how contradictory they might seem) under my personal interpretation of the Nietzschean ideal of “life,” as applied to political life. Perhaps then we will be in a better position to assess the normative value of deception.

❖Life❖

The Nietzschean notion of “life,” is not equivalent to life in the sense of biological existence. Merely living, for Nietzsche, actually possesses little to no normative value, or meaning beyond that which humans wish to ascribe to it. This is strongly suggested by Nietzsche’s emphasis on the unjustified nature of existence in his work.¹³ He even goes so far as to say that “we need not be bothered with why the “world” exists, why “humanity” exists, unless we want to crack a joke,”¹⁴ but this is

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Utility and Liability of History for Life,” in *Unfashionable Observations*, trans. Richard T. Gray (Stanford: Stanford UP. 1995) 107.

¹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Utility and Liability of History For Life,” 153.

not to say that human life cannot have any meaning for us. Nietzsche writes, “only man placed values in things to preserve himself-- he alone created a meaning for things,” and that, “through esteeming alone is there value: and without esteeming, the nut of existence would be hollow.”¹⁵ Nietzsche wishes to avoid such a “hollow” existence by proposing that the absence of objective meaning in life can make us free to be able to create our own purposes which could be “lofty and noble,” and he advises people who wish to attempt this to, “Go ahead and perish in the attempt-- I know of no better purpose in life than perishing in the attempt to accomplish something great and impossible.”¹⁶ Arguably, “life” in the sense that Nietzsche uses the term is more closely identifiable with pursuing the “great” and “noble,” but those terms are too vague to offer a clear notion of his ideal of “life.” Nietzsche, in one of his later works, claims that the will to inflict great suffering and not perish from the distress it may cause belongs to greatness,¹⁷ but it would be problematic to argue that he believed greatness only concerns pitiless cruelty, and the infliction of suffering. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche makes a point of saying that slaying the pity we feel for others should be done so as to help man feel more joy, and by “learning better to feel joy, we learn best not to hurt others or to plan hurts for them.”¹⁸ By describing the goal to be aspired to as “noble,” it is possible that Nietzsche was not using the

¹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (London: Penguin Books 1978), 59.

¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Utility and Liability of History For Life,” *ibid.*

¹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Gay Science,” trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) 195.

¹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 88.

term to mean “morally good.” Rather, a “noble” goal could also imply some connection to an elite, but an elite that is characterized by great, and rare, achievements. The case is similarly vague with the actual definition of life that Nietzsche offers: a “dark, driving, insatiable power that lusts after itself.”¹⁹ That Nietzsche would characterize life as a “power,” seems to imply that he thought that life was bound up in the conditions we create to underlie the actions we wish to pursue, because a “power” is a kind of potential capacity for action of some kind. Hence, one might interpret Nietzsche as claiming that, among other things, the service of life requires the living to act in such a way as to create the necessary conditions for further actions; constantly paving the way for further noble and worthy ventures.

In his piece, “Nietzsche on Nobility and The Affirmation of Life,” Thomas Hamilton discusses Nietzsche’s use of the term “noble,” and he identifies two ways in which Nietzsche conceives of nobility (worldly, and internal), and how they relate to two ways of serving life. Hamilton identifies a “worldly” notion of nobility in Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals*, which Nietzsche applies to a past ruling class (or elite) that was magnanimous, strong, and filled with “vitality.”²⁰ These worldly nobles actively create their own sense of the “good” out of a conviction of their own goodness (i.e. whatever is related to them, they see as “good”), and their notion of “badness” or “evil” is developed in relation to those they see as not belonging to their

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Utility and Liability of History For Life,” 106.

²⁰ Thomas Hamilton, “Nietzsche on Nobility and The Affirmation of Life,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* Vol.3, No.2 (2000): 170.

elite (that which is external to their notion of “goodness”).²¹ They readily act on their drives, and Hamilton connects this with a notion of serving life that requires the willingness of an individual to take part in the eternal return (a thought experiment in which it is posited that one will have to relive the same life over and over again throughout eternity, and one must judge whether one’s actions would be worth repeating under those circumstances).²² The worldly nobles supposedly would relive their lives over again, and Hamilton believes that this is one sense in which Nietzsche believes life can be affirmed (by possessing a willingness to repeat one’s actions, as well as suffer past pains and mistakes).²³ Hamilton, however, finds this characterization of nobility and its corresponding notion of serving life unsatisfactory, because Nietzsche never provides a specific example of such a noble character beyond the vague descriptions of elites within ancient civilizations such as the Romans, Japanese, Greeks (or the “Homeric heroes”).²⁴ Hamilton claims that Nietzsche could not give a specific example of what he had in mind, because the actual examples (e.g. Achilles) did not really fit his notion of nobility; figures such as Achilles were vengeful, and calculating instead of directly active and beyond petty behavior.²⁵ Hence, without a clear example of what Nietzsche wants, Hamilton holds that Nietzsche cannot fully articulate his notion of the “worldly noble.”

²¹ Thomas Hamilton, “Nietzsche on the Nobility and The Affirmation of Life,” 171.

²² Thomas Hamilton, “Nietzsche on the Nobility and The Affirmation of Life,” 172.

²³ Thomas Hamilton, “Nietzsche on the Nobility and The Affirmation of Life,” 171.

²⁴ Thomas Hamilton, “Nietzsche on the Nobility and The Affirmation of Life,” 174.

²⁵ Thomas Hamilton, “Nietzsche on the Nobility and The Affirmation of Life,” *ibid.*

I would argue that Hamilton's approach to characterizing the worldly noble is flawed on the grounds that having a specific example of such a figure is not necessary. Nietzsche frequently utilized idealized notions of history and famous figures in order to instill the sense that the "greatness" and "nobility" he aspired to was possible in the past, and could therefore be possible in the future. This manner of reasoning is made more clear in Nietzsche's, "On the Utility and Liability of History for Life," where Nietzsche introduces three styles of historical interpretation (the monumental, the antiquarian, and the critical), which he believes can serve life if practiced properly, and under the right circumstances.²⁶ The monumental perspective might be described as placing the value of action above the value of historical correctness or veracity. This stance chooses to venerate the greatness of past events, people, and achievements, so as to produce the courage necessary for further great achievements by inculcating the sentiment in us that "the greatness that once existed was at least possible at one time, and that it therefore will probably be possible again."²⁷ This is made possible through generalization, misidentification, and reinterpretation of history, so as to produce helpful fictions and myths that can spur action.²⁸ Nietzsche may be interpreted as using the monumental perspective in his own work when discussing past instances of nobility.

Another reason Hamilton's desire for a clear, historical, example can be avoided is that Nietzsche does provide some clear guidance as to what a noble

²⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Utility and Liability of History For Life," 104.

²⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Utility and Liability of History For Life," 98.

²⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Utility and Liability of History For Life," 99-100.

individual is through his ideal of the Übermensch, or “over man.” In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche discusses three key metamorphoses the Übermensch must progress through. The first stage is that of the camel, where an individual can only accept the burdens of values and judgments placed on it by others, and one is too meek to question them, or flout them.²⁹ Then, one must progress to the stage of the lion (if one can), where the individual seeks to question and attack as many of the old values (the values one was once made to accept, along with the values of others), realizing that every value has been artificially created (i.e. there is no objective moral value, only the subjective values of humans).³⁰ After renouncing all objective values, Nietzsche claims that one may be free to finally reach the stage of the baby: one who creates new values, and ultimately says “yes” to life.³¹ After creating his own virtue, the Übermensch “makes his virtue his addiction,” as it compels him to keep living, and to justify his future existence.³² In short, the Übermensch overcomes values that hold him back, and lives on with new values in order to remedy to existential problem that Nietzsche raises to his readers.

In fairness to Hamilton, he recognizes this sense of overcoming in Nietzsche’s notion of nobility, but he classifies it as internal nobility, instead of worldly nobility. Internal nobility, in Hamilton’s view, comes from the ability to overcome any notions of weaker moralities that one might possess (e.g. a belief in the legitimacy of

²⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 26.

³⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 27.

³¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *ibid.*

³² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 15-16.

vengeance),³³ and one who is internally noble affirms life by developing a love of fate, or *amor fati*.³⁴ In this way, the individual is capable of appreciating the worth of his life, despite how much pain he has suffered; however, Hamilton holds that an internally noble figure would not be prepared to eternally return.³⁵ Hamilton arrives at this conclusion by assessing the figure of Achilles (again, as he is presented by Homer, and not in the idealized sense that Nietzsche presents him in), who was able at times to overcome his feelings of vengeance (e.g. when he allowed Priam to retrieve the body of his dead son), yet would presumably not have wanted to re-experience the losses he suffered (e.g. the death of Patroclus).³⁶ It could be suggested that Hamilton does himself a disservice by establishing a false dichotomy in Nietzsche's views on nobility. The love of fate that the internally noble individual would need in order to affirm life would also be necessary for the worldly noble individual who would readily act on his drives regardless of the consequences. That *amor fati* is precisely what the worldly noble person would need in order to say he would relive life again, including all his suffering. Also, the ability to overcome the values that might hold one back would be essential for an individual who is as committed to action as the worldly noble. Arguably, there is more unity in Nietzsche's notion of nobility than Hamilton might expect.

³³ Thomas Hamilton, "Nietzsche on the Nobility and The Affirmation of Life," 181.

³⁴ Thomas Hamilton, "Nietzsche on the Nobility and The Affirmation of Life," 181-182.

³⁵ Thomas Hamilton, "Nietzsche on the Nobility and The Affirmation of Life," *ibid*.

³⁶ Thomas Hamilton, "Nietzsche on the Nobility and The Affirmation of Life," *ibid*.

There are similarly problematic attempts to come to terms with Nietzsche's notions of life affirmation and nobility in much of the secondary literature on the subject. Along with Hamilton who concludes that Nietzsche's concepts are lacking in coherency and intelligibility, Paul Carus seems to suggest that this is intentional on Nietzsche's part. He argues that Nietzsche's work cannot be presented in a logical fashion, supposedly because Nietzsche appeals to the sentiments of his readers, rather than to their intellect.³⁷ Bernard Reginster, in his book *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, explains that much of the frustration that has been expressed in other authors' attempts to extract a coherent philosophy around one of Nietzsche's central concepts is precisely because of this approach (an approach that focuses on there needing to be a central concept). He writes, "the systematicity of his [Nietzsche's] philosophy, in other words, is determined not by a central philosophical doctrine, but by the requirements of his response to a particular crisis in late modern European culture, namely, the crisis of nihilism."³⁸ By focusing on a central concern, instead of a central concept, Nietzsche's concepts and arguments may be found to possess more coherency and fruitful conclusions.

Reginster proposes that Nietzsche saw the affirmation of life as a way to combat the forces of nihilism, yet this is not to say that Nietzsche was only responding to one form of nihilism. Actually, Reginster identifies two forms of nihilism that Nietzsche is trying to address: 1) *despair* (where one realizes that the

³⁷ Paul Carus, "Friedrich Nietzsche," *The Monist*, Vol.17, No.2, (1907): 230.

³⁸ Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P. 2006) 4.

“highest values,” or the predominant Christian values of Nietzsche’s time, might not be realizable in this world), and 2) *disorientation* (where an individual arrives at the conclusion that nothing really matters upon coming to recognize that there is no objective meaning in the world).³⁹ One might interpret Nietzsche’s philosophy as dealing with despair and disorientation in a systematic and consecutive manner, because disorientation is likely to follow despair. Despair occurs along with the discrediting (or lack of an ability to prove a claim either true or false⁴⁰) of the idea of God, which for many Christians is the premise upon which all their moral order, and values can be realized.⁴¹ One might argue that this is because many (if not all) Christian values are in some way considered to have come from God, in one way or another. If faith in the higher being becomes less tenable, the values that have been ascribed to His existence also lose their objective standing in the eyes of the nihilist, and this conflicts with his desire to possess objective truth about morality (something that develops out of a moral valuation of truth that insists in its realizability in this world).⁴² Christian values such as possessing moral truth, and subservience to God, are “life-negating” in the sense that they cannot be realized under the conditions of this world.⁴³ a world that (as previously discussed) does not possess objective meaning, with only anthropomorphic truths and values. Reginster claims that

³⁹ Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, 8-9.

⁴⁰ Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, 40.

⁴¹ Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, 39.

⁴² Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, 45.

⁴³ Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, 47.

Nietzsche recognizes the Nihilistic tendency to despair is reliant on a deep commitment to the value of truth, and the best way to remedy the situation (apart from miraculously proving the existence of God) is to question and re-evaluate as many of the values that cannot be satisfied in the world as we know it.⁴⁴ Essentially, one must enter the stage of the lion in order to see that one's despair is motivated by implicit, life-negating values.

However, the stage of the lion, if taken to its conclusion, invites the other form of nihilism: disorientation. Disorientation occurs after the "devaluation of all values," or the realization that the "highest" values are all contingent, rather than externally imposed on the agent by an objective moral authority.⁴⁵ Again, the nihilist is (on a deep level) motivated by a desire for objective truth, and he even goes so far as to claim that the only values that can exist must be objectively true ones.⁴⁶ If his value of truth is called into question, though, then the nihilist's life, and its meaning (or value) are also called into question, but this is a manner of reasoning that Nietzsche rejects. Reginster agrees with this perspective, and explains that Nietzsche's "strategy" is to show any potential nihilists that all values "necessarily bear the subjective tinge of our perspectives."⁴⁷ Then, if we accept that all values are ultimately subjective, then we might be in a position where we can begin to acknowledge the "value of created values," but Reginster points out that Nietzsche

⁴⁴ Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, 50.

⁴⁵ Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, 56.

⁴⁶ Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, 59.

cannot give a reason based on objective fact to Nihilists as to why they should place more worth in created values; instead, he must seduce them into accepting the worth of artificial values.⁴⁸ Nietzsche even accepts the difficulty of trying to believe in a value that is not objective, and this is why Reginster describes Nietzsche as a “normative fictionalist,” or one who accepts that there might not be any objective values, yet still chooses to treat certain values as objective via a process of “make-believe.”⁴⁹ The value of such an approach manifests itself in the ability of a pretend-objective value to motivate one to continue living,⁵⁰ by lending meaning to life (something we require to live). Reginster writes that, “a goal makes life worth living, only if it inspires the agent to go on living.”⁵¹ We might say that Nietzsche’s concept of life-affirmation is ultimately about the process through which an agent must go in order to create the goals and values that would enable him to avoid a hatred and devaluation of his life, while also inspiring him to continue living. The thing to aspire to is a life that is not immobilized by a lack of normative direction but, rather, a life of acting and creating (something even worth re-living). At this point, we might ask how this notion of serving life may be implemented in, or considered from, a political standpoint. I would suggest that life is served by politics (or political life is served) when the political arrangement or constitution of a state allows citizens to acquire

⁴⁸ Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, 70.

⁴⁹ Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, 85.

⁵⁰ Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, 86-87.

⁵¹ Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, 24.

meaning and values they may live by or, failing that, at least allows citizens to question the values of society so as to create their own values.

❖*Lying in Service to Life*❖

With a sense of what “serving life” means, we might begin to assess how lying and deception might allow for this pursuit. As discussed earlier, the manipulation of history so as to inspire the pursuit of greatness that we find in the monumental mode of history may be construed as a form of deception. This manner of lying about the past would arguably require more than one person to take part in it. When Nietzsche wrote about monumental history, he viewed it as a cultural practice that a society could be drawn into. Politicians even to this day utilize idealized notions of the past to garner support for their proposed efforts (e.g. the numerous American politicians who make references to the “founding fathers” when running for office). However, lying about the past may also be practiced on a lower, more private, level in society. Some households engage in the construction of elaborate family mythologies to inculcate a sense of pride and willingness to aspire in future generations. An example of this may be where a parent tells their child that they are related to some notable figure from the past, and this would serve the same purpose as a monumental history. The sense that greatness has been achieved, hence it may be achieved again could take root in that child, yet he would be faced with the same dangers of monumental history that Nietzsche describes.

While Nietzsche argues that every person requires a “protecting and enveloping cloud” of illusion,⁵² he also draws attention to some of the social and political dangers of viewing history monumentally. By increasingly making the past mythological, the past itself may be damaged as entire portions of it are set aside, and the encouragement that monumental history provides for us (depending on who is manipulating the perception of history) may also lead to “rashness in those who are courageous and fanaticism in those who are inspired... then empires will be destroyed, princes murdered, wars and revolutions incited.”⁵³ Here, we see a possible distinction in Nietzsche’s notion of greatness of action. Certain actions may be “great,” but “greatness” is a term that has acquired a fair amount of moral ambiguity. There may be instances of great altruism, or nobility, as well as great atrocities and wrongdoings. That being said, one might interpret Nietzsche to be advocating greatness of action in a positive, constructive, sense; however, this must be understood in tandem with Nietzsche’s notion that destruction may also be a necessary component of creation. This point is also stressed when Nietzsche identifies another way in which monumental history can stifle life: that if monumental history becomes accepted, and idealized, too much by the masses within a culture, it may lead to the damning sentiment that the examples of greatness from the past are the only ones to be had, and that they can never be surpassed or brought about again.⁵⁴ With greatness already having been achieved, a widespread apathy (or hostility, even) could develop if one

⁵² Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Utility and Liability of History For Life,” 134.

⁵³ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Utility and Liability of History For Life,” 100.

⁵⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Utility and Liability of History For Life,” 101.

questions whether further greatness is necessary, or even can be achieved. Under these circumstances, monumental history is turned against itself, and little space is left for the pursuit of greatness. If too much emphasis is placed on the greatness of past relatives, or past figures in general, one might develop the feeling that one is living in the shadow of those figures, and may become disillusioned with attempting to surpass them or achieve any kind of greatness at all. Then, a critical view of history needs to be applied in order to do away with the stifling elements of the idealized past that negate future action.⁵⁵ Therefore, sometimes destruction of values is necessary to pave the way for creation of values, yet the destruction of society that Nietzsche claims would result from rash and fanatical individuals controlling the historical and political lies being told is a more negative form of destruction.

This view coincides and complements the perspective espoused in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* by Hannah Arendt. In her book, Arendt brings to light just how much the totalitarian regimes of the early 20th century relied on lies that were meant to create fictional political realities for their citizens that placed them in an ideological perspective that was hostile towards the rest of the world (e.g. lies told in Nazi Germany meant to convince the people that “the whole world had solidly lined up against them”).⁵⁶ She states that the citizens under totalitarian rule had to be won over with propaganda, indoctrination, and violence when it was conducive to realizing the party’s “ideological doctrines and its practical lies,” (such as a refusal to

⁵⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Utility and Liability of History for Life,” 106-107.

⁵⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (New York: Harcourt Inc. 1966), 393.

acknowledge unemployment).⁵⁷ Rewriting history, burning books and source material that conflicted with the “truths” that were being presented, and contributing to the prejudices of segments of the population (most notably, anti-Semitism) with aggressive misinformation and lying campaigns are all well-known methods of those totalitarian regimes. Arendt identifies what she considers to be the uniquely egregious nature of totalitarianism when she writes, “the reason why the ingenious devices of totalitarian rule, with their absolute and unsurpassed concentration of power in the hands of a single man, were never tried out before, is that no ordinary tyrant was ever mad enough to discard all limited and local interests-- economic, national, human, military-- in favor of a purely fictitious reality in some indefinite distant future.”⁵⁸ Totalitarianism is, fundamentally, the realization of Nietzsche’s worst fear concerning the practice of monumental history. With a profoundly egoistic, uncaring, and *ressentiment*-filled leader at the helm, solely in charge of creating the myths that will motivate a society, “then empires will be destroyed, princes murdered, wars and revolutions incited.” Totalitarianism, in Nietzschean terms, is a reactive ideology that requires hostility towards an “other,” and, for that reason (despite the “ingenious” methods of totalitarian regimes that Arendt mentions), could never be creative enough to produce values and actions that could affirm life and this world. Totalitarian states had to appeal, as Arendt drew our attention to earlier, to a fictional world complete with the rejection of the ability on the part of their citizens to question the values they purported to be objectively and normatively true. With this knowledge, one might

⁵⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 341.

⁵⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 412.

easily make the argument that lying in politics is a slippery slope: slippery if it comes to be accepted and conceptually legitimized, and even more slippery depending on who attempts to practice it. However, it is not adequate to merely suggest that politicians must cease to lie, since the likelihood of such a state of affairs coming to fruition is dubious to say the least.

Nietzsche understood that lying as practiced by individuals within society and politics has a negative weight attributed to it as well. In his “On Truth and Lying in Non-Moral Sense,” Nietzsche describes the process by which the concepts of truth and deception were created and developed meaning. In the piece, Nietzsche presents his own social contract theory, arguing that when man entered into society, “truth” was established along with (and in relation to) the construction of language.⁵⁹ He writes that the “legislation of language also produces the first laws of truth,” since language operates on having fixed terms of designation that are meant to have the “same validity and force” for all of those who use it.⁶⁰ Nietzsche holds that it is also here (the moment that language is constructed) that the liar makes his first appearance. He describes the liar as one who “uses the valid tokens of designation (words) to make the unreal appear to be real... he misuses the established conventions by arbitrarily switching or even inverting the names for things.”⁶¹ Now, in Nietzsche’s mind, the mere misuse of societal conventions does not by itself acquire the negative

⁵⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense,” in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Guess, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 143.

⁶⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense,” *ibid.*

⁶¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense,” *ibid.*

weight that is so often attached to lying, because he writes that “human beings do not so much flee from being tricked as from being harmed by being tricked.”⁶² Rather, it is the use of deception for “selfish and otherwise harmful” purposes that makes the liar lose whatever trust society has for him.⁶³ Lying, then, seems to develop an intrinsic negative weight out of what is originally a consequentialist judgment.

Hence, Nietzsche might say that, in a positivist sense, lying is seen as wrong or ethically unacceptable, yet he would reject any kind of attempt to imbue lying with a negative intrinsic weight. This is suggested by Nietzsche’s argument that “truth” itself is a kind of lie. He calls the reader’s attention to the status of truth by asking, “Is there a perfect match between things and their designations? Is language the full and adequate expression of all realities?”, and he claims that “only through forgetfulness could human beings ever entertain the illusion that they possess truth to the degree described above.”⁶⁴ For Nietzsche, language is merely the conveyance of metaphors that are supposed to stand for subjective, bodily, experiences of stimuli (which are themselves also metaphors that stand for something outside of us that we do not experience directly).⁶⁵ We never experience the world outside of our bodies directly, because our experiences are always mediated by our senses and our ability to adequately apply concepts to stimuli, but (according to Nietzsche) we convince

⁶² Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense,” *ibid.*

⁶³ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense,” *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense,” *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense,” 144.

ourselves that the words we use to convey these subjective experiences actually apply to the things in themselves, outside of us (one might even call them noumena).⁶⁶

While Nietzsche recognizes a certain absurdity in human beings striving for truth and factual correctness while operating on a system of “illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions,”⁶⁷ nevertheless, he does not believe humanity has committed a moral mistake in doing this. To the contrary, the fact that we forget that we are using artificial “truths,” may be considered a helpful form of forgetting, or living ahistorically, which Nietzsche believes may also serve life.⁶⁸ He marvels at how we have used these rhetorical falsehoods when he describes humanity as “a mighty architectural genius who succeeds in erecting the infinitely complicated cathedral of concepts on moving foundations, or even, one might say, on flowing water.”⁶⁹ The system of concepts we have created is something Nietzsche sees as the basis for society and culture, since without them we would not have been able to share experiences with one another, and our fiction-making is expressed by our culture in several ways. Nietzsche cites “deception, flattery, lying and cheating, speaking behind the backs of others, keeping up appearances, living in borrowed finery, wearing masks, the drapery of convention, play-acting for the benefit of others and oneself” as different facets of the “art of dissimulation,” that we practice in

⁶⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense,” *ibid.*

⁶⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense,” 146.

⁶⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Utility and Liability of History For Life,” 89.

⁶⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense,” 147.

culture.⁷⁰ This, perhaps, is the most crucial argument for the importance and necessity of lying (in the Nietzschean sense of the term) in the service of life; in short, it allows for human beings to act, express themselves, and create, collectively, such that it becomes possible for people to contribute to a common pursuit of life (i.e. it allows for culture to be established). If the affirmation of life ultimately lies in finding ways to create meaning for life, such a collective effort that we find in culture may, in the end, be indispensable, and lying supports this collective effort by allowing it to be established in the first place (without lying, there would never have been society, let alone culture). Furthermore, if this collective effort to produce meaning and value is to continue, the government then takes on the role of a protector of culture (e.g. passing culture on to new generations via education, and fostering culture through the provision of incentives such as grants for scientific, medical, and artistic endeavors). The ideal relationship between a state and its citizens, if one subscribes to the perspective that government ought to serve life, is conceptualized as a permissive, yet caring paternalistic figure; a power that cares about whether people want to continue living, and will propagate culture by providing values for those who will accept them, and by being flexible enough to allow and encourage others to create their own values and meaning in life.

One might question whether society would exist if we could not lie. If, at some point in the development of our species, we had been able to turn off the ability we share to lie and create fictions (two activities that are not necessarily the same, yet

⁷⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense," 142.

require the same faculties), we would never have been able to maintain social unity or coherency (at least, enough social unity for the creation of shared cultures, and political institutions that could continue to guarantee this social unity). Early human beings placed new strains on themselves securing their survival by moving from small family groups into larger tribal communities. Apart from the “fight or flight” instincts we share with most animals, we had to develop another option (a third option) in order to meet the new challenges of living in a society: a willingness to deceive creatively. If one group member hurt another member, or did something to endanger the whole group, fighting the group was not an option for that individual (i.e. one of the reasons why individuals banded together was to find strength in numbers). Also, if an individual left the group, he would be giving up the security benefits of the community, and putting himself at great risk. To secure his life within the group, it is reasonable to suggest that man had to be able to lie, to place blame on things outside of the community, and to feign ignorance of personal culpability. If everyone was aware of what everyone thought, did, and said, could we ever really get along? We, as creatures who constantly wish for something better in terms of our lives, selves, and close-ones, could not have handled the truth. Our species would have given up a long time ago had we not been able to suppress the thought in our minds that every individual in a society is capable of throwing off the reigns of the group at any time. We needed to maintain an appearance of social unity through commonly accepted falsehoods, and lies told in private and public to make others, and possibly ourselves, believe what good “team players” we are. Furthermore, one

must not be so naïve as to think that we have outgrown our need for deception to maintain our lives. It is as crucial today as it has always been to maintain fictions and falsehoods in order to assure trust and structure within society and political relations.

However, the claim that the stability of society and its political structures requires the practice of deception sounds too extreme without the added caveat that we must also provide a time and place for the value of honesty, or at least attempting to be truthful. If we were all to be dishonest, all of the time, no one would ever believe anyone, nor understand anyone as those who subscribe to the “transparency thesis,” might claim. Thomas L. Carson describes the transparency thesis as the view that, generally, saying “it is true that X,” and just saying “X,” are essentially equivalent, because “it is true that” does not add any meaning to what one states (i.e. that one warrants the truth of one’s statements is taken for granted when one decides to communicate with others).⁷¹ I would argue that an obstacle to this position’s effectiveness resides in the fact that it relies on a narrow notion of the “originally intended” use of communication, and then it implicitly expects that a moral imperative can be drawn from this usage. Communication, while it did have to be used honestly at times in order for it to be shared, was never *always* intended to be an honest activity, especially since lying may have naturally developed as a survival response to living within a society. There is also the much over-looked possibility that language developed as a means of misleading. Despite all of this, one cannot help but still respect the importance of honesty in social life. There are times when we need

⁷¹ Thomas L. Carson, *Lying and Deception: Theory and Practice*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010) 24-25.

others to be honest so that we can better secure our own lives and the lives of other group members. There are also times when knowing the truth (or what many would agree to be the “truth”), instead of believing an intentionally-communicated falsehood, might better inspire individuals to live fuller and happier lives. Within the Nietzschean framework, one can question the value of honesty, come to realize that it is premised upon the possibility that one can know the truth objectively, and still posit it as a worthy value or virtue to possess. The most difficult thing for an individual to struggle with, though, is the question of when it is right to exercise the virtues of honesty and dishonesty, but one will always be trying to answer that question with one hand tied behind the back if one forswears any and all manifestations of either virtue.

Separate from the issue of honesty, one might question whether Nietzsche’s normative fictionalism is a form of lying. Does the *Übermensch* lie to himself by making his newly created values his addiction (as though they are objective values) after having acknowledged that all values are equally lacking in objective content? Reginster suggests that if the individual were to create his values, and then purposefully forget that they are merely subjective truths, then the individual would be engaging in a form of self-deception that Nietzsche would not approve of.⁷² He also suggests that the normative fictionalist engages in a very slight mode of deception that involves, “deliberately keeping attention away from conflicting evidence.”⁷³ One might call this style of deception “concealment,” however it is

⁷² Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, 92.

⁷³ Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, *ibid.*

questionable as to whether concealing may be considered lying. Concealing something (especially from one's self) can have an intentional or unintentional connotation to it. Perhaps, a more interesting way to see the problem is if we consider how a Nietzschean parent, or politician (not to make the error of uttering an oxymoron) might deal with being responsible for sharing their values with others. How could a parent or politician force, or try to convince, others of the worth of their personal values? Perhaps, if the notion of serving life were to be made clear to those who are being introduced to created values, then productive dialogues could be established that attempt to gauge the seductive power of values that are meant to inspire us to live.

❖ *A Genealogy of Lying* ❖

That Nietzsche advocated the pursuit and creation of new values that allow for action as a means of serving life is clear. However, in terms of which values ought to be adopted or created, Nietzsche leaves a good deal of space for interpretation for those who aspire to create values. He also does not prescribe any particular course of action to achieve nobility, apart from living and (if need be) perishing in the attempt to affirm life. What he presents his readers with are possible elements that may be conducive to action and the pursuit of life-affirming values (e.g. a mythology that can inspire, a need for questioning values, boldness in the face of the status quo, etc.). Nietzsche shows that lying and deception can be elements in an unknown formula for life-affirming values and, in doing so, argues for the value of such activities. However, throughout the course of western philosophy, numerous definitions of

nobility and values that lend meaning to life have been proposed, along with various perspectives on whether lying may be conducive to establishing a desirable relationship between citizens and their rulers. Hence, the value of a genealogy of different perspectives within political theory concerning lies and deceit may be in the potential for such a project to shed light on different notions of whether lying may be valuable in the pursuit of a great end or telos. Certainly, every philosopher did not speak of “life” and “values” in the sense that Nietzsche did, but it is possible to interpret these theorists as having filled in the blank spaces (according to their own sentiments and beliefs) that Nietzsche left for his readers. A “life” that is well-served for some philosophers could consist of achieving a state of mind through virtuous action, while for others it could be characterized by maintaining a powerful state via the exercise of political prowess. Each notion of what is to be aspired to is also matched with a corresponding notion of what action ought to be taken to arrive at the end goal, and there is a large portion of controversy among the canon of political philosophers concerning whether lying is an acceptable activity for the pursuit of aims that are “lofty” and “noble.” Due to the fact that Nietzsche did not define his terms so strictly, conflicting viewpoints can still operate within his system of life-affirmation, and can stand to inform one another in productive ways. Therefore, I will bring each philosopher I am examining into discussion with Nietzsche, and his framework, so as to ultimately assess the value of deception to the pursuit of noble action, new values, and the service of life. Although I cannot claim to know any objective meaning of the terms “nobility,” or what actions will unconditionally lead to

its attainment, I will argue that lying can (but not always) serve life by helping to produce the necessary conditions for seducing one to live (i.e. a stable society and government in which a collective process of value formation is possible).

Furthermore, beyond serving as a condition for life, I will argue that lying itself is a course of action that can result in noble ends.

Chapter 2: *Pseudea*

The ancient Greeks were fascinated with deceit, lies, fiction, appearances, and truth (all of which are among the wide range of relevant concepts when discussing lying and deception). One always runs the risk of an anachronistic judgment when comparing modern times with past times, but I would argue that at least one comparison must be made: the moral ambiguity surrounding lies was just as prevalent then as it is today. The Greeks had a very complex moral framework which they used to assess deception in politics and society as well as the ideal relationship between a government and its people, but the line between the political and the social realms was not always so clear for the ancient Greeks, since one's social life was often wrapped up in one's political existence. Despite this, one could argue that the Greeks applied their moral framework differently in regards to lies told among citizens in society and lies told by politicians. I will argue that the Greek philosophers often believed lying in politics to be a necessity (if not a duty), while lying in the social sphere was largely considered a vice and detrimental to the *polis*. Moreover, I will show that the complex moral framework possessed by the Greeks was succeeded by a much more extreme perspective on lying proposed by the early Christians (notably St Augustine).

❖*Social Lies*❖

It may very well be, as Alasdair MacIntyre argues, that the Greeks' communitarianism presupposed a common set of beliefs within the community that acted as a criteria for moral guidance for individuals as well as the larger group (a

standard normative criteria he believes we are missing today),⁷⁴ but it would be fair to argue that even those commonly held beliefs could be subject to varying interpretations and usages. The vocabulary the Greeks used to address issues of deception reflected this complexity. The Greeks did not have one word that was synonymous with “lying.” Rather, their word *pseudea* was applied to a variety of different circumstances in which falsehoods were at issue, and one would have to designate a *pseudos* as either intentional or unintentional in order to denote “lying” as opposed to plain “deception.”⁷⁵ This distinction has carried over into our language as well, since we can see it reflected in how we choose to describe certain occurrences in social life. One can deceive without lying, since giving someone a false impression is not dependent on the intentionality behind it, and one can also lie without deceiving (e.g. I might be a terrible liar whose lies are easily made transparent, or I might lie to you by telling you the truth if I am very much mistaken about what is actually the case in reality).

Lying and deceitful behavior in ancient Greek society was seen as a vice by many, but also as evidence of superior mental prowess and intellectual power (cunning). In Pericles’ funeral oration (in Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*), deception is presented as a practice and vice of the enemy, directly in conflict with the democratic tradition of Athens.⁷⁶ Pericles claims that Athens, in contrast to

⁷⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: Third Edition* (Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 2008), 20-21.

⁷⁵ Louise H. Pratt, *Lying and Poetry from Homer to Pindar*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996) 56.

⁷⁶ Malcolm Schofield, “The Noble Lie,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato’s Republic*, ed. by G.R.F. Ferrari (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 140.

Sparta, “is open to the world, and we have no periodical deportations in order to prevent people observing or finding out secrets which might be of military advantage to the enemy.”⁷⁷ This suggests that Athens holds the truth to be an even higher priority than national defense. This is not to say however that the Athenians did not have any “periodical deportations,” because they still had the ability to ostracize members of their community (or to collectively vote an individual out of the community due to the perceived threat they posed). Upholding the truth in the way that Pericles speaks of is also strongly tied to upholding the freedom of the Athenian citizens, not only in the theoretical sense of abstaining from controlling the thoughts of the citizenry, but also in the literal sense of avoiding the measures a state would have to take in order to conceal the truth. Pericles no doubt mentions this as proof of the power of Athens, but one may also interpret Pericles offering this statement as proof of Athens’ moral superiority over Sparta. Pericles goes on to say that the Athenians “take our decisions on policy, or submit them to proper discussions: for we do not think that there is an incompatibility between words and deeds.”⁷⁸ This refers specifically to the respect the Athenians had for deliberation and how they allowed for words and deeds to have equal importance (the implication being that the war-loving Spartans liked to throw spears first and pose questions later or not at all), but it may also be understood in a different sense: that the Athenians not only want their words and deeds to be of compatible importance, but that they literally want their

⁷⁷ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin Group, 1972), bk 2.39.

⁷⁸ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, bk 2.40.

words and deeds to be compatible with one another. “To say one thing and do another” is a phrase that many throughout history have associated with lying and deceit, and to say that the Athenians value the compatibility of their words and deeds means that lying and deception (the opposite of making words and deeds compatible) have an intrinsic negative meaning or connotation in ancient Greek culture.

Aristotle also seems to express this view while discussing deception in social life. A great deal can be inferred from how he discusses truth and honesty in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. There he writes, “falsehood is in itself mean and culpable, and truth noble and worthy of praise.”⁷⁹ He also says of the “truthful man” that, “he will avoid falsehood as something base, seeing that he avoided it even for its own sake: and such a man is worthy of praise.”⁸⁰ By “truthful man,” Aristotle does not necessarily mean a person who is always honest though. He explains this further when he writes, “we are not speaking of the same man who keeps faith in his agreements, i.e. in the things that pertain to justice or injustice (for this would belong to another virtue) but the man who in the matters in which nothing of this sort is at stake is true both in word and in life.”⁸¹ Aristotle is speaking of the person who is true to his reputation, who does not boast or deprecate himself when presenting himself to others.⁸² Considering this, however, one might infer that he would have considered, what we might call, “honesty” to be a separate virtue from “truthfulness,” suggesting

⁷⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (New York: Oxford UP, 2009) 1127a26.

⁸⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1127b5.

⁸¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1127a34-1127b

⁸² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1127a30-32.

that one could possibly have one of those virtues while not having the other. However, Aristotle claims that this is unlikely, believing that if a man really does appreciate truth, and does his best to uphold the truth in trivial matters, he would be even more likely to speak the truth when the stakes are higher.⁸³ In the context of reputation, Aristotle holds that a virtuous person would not boast, or sell himself short, but he does not object to the virtuous person understating the truth.⁸⁴ This is not self-deprecation because one is not claiming to have done less than what one actually has done, but instead one is simply not telling the whole truth. Aristotle thought there were varying degrees of understatement, since he describes people who refuse to acknowledge trivial or obvious qualities (mock-modest characters) as “humbugs,” whereas there are others who practice understatement with moderation (the more virtuous characters).⁸⁵ Aristotle claims that Socrates was in fact a mock-modest,⁸⁶ but it is not clear whether he considered him to be a moderate one or a humbug (a ‘difficult’ characterization to make when considering a person nick-named “the gadfly”).

Aside from the negative weight attached to deception in Greek society, there was also a degree of normative value placed on the ability to lie, and lie well. Clearly, the ancient Greeks were prepared to praise liars for their cunning and intelligent schemes. By the time Pericles made his famous funeral oration, Homer’s *Iliad* and

⁸³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1127b3.

⁸⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1127b7.

⁸⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1127b23-30.

⁸⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, *ibid.*

Odyssey had been disseminated throughout Greece and had already become a significant part of Greek culture. The names Achilles and Odysseus were known and revered by all, but they were praised for different reasons (reasons that Plato would expand on in his *Hippias Minor*). In brief, Achilles was known for his strength and agility on the battlefield, fighting his enemies face to face. Odysseus was an excellent archer and wrestler, but his most powerful weapons were his mind and his “silver-tongue.” He was the mastermind behind the Trojan horse, which allowed the Greeks to covertly enter Troy and end the siege. Achilles hated liars,⁸⁷ and Odysseus was one. Yet, they fought on the same side, and had mutual respect for each other. That two opposing ethical perspectives could be reconciled, and could love and mourn one another seems paradoxical, yet somehow fitting. As Louise H. Pratt points out, this duality is represented by the figure of the ancient Greek bard. On the one hand, such traveling poets were responsible for the passing on of the stories, myths and values that collectively made up the shared culture of the Greeks (a predominantly oral culture), which made the bards the preservers of knowledge and truth, while on the other hand they were also entertainers and utilizers of fiction.⁸⁸ The “truths” that story tellers possessed were not seen as factual ones (the kind we see today in modern histories); rather, they were considered to hold ethical truths in the metaphors and aphorisms of the stories they told. The tales they sang may not have been literally true, but the messages they wished to convey were arguably greater truths for most ancient Greeks. In this way, fiction was made to serve the truth, and we might say that

⁸⁷ Louise H. Pratt, *Lying and Poetry from Homer to Pindar*, 21.

⁸⁸ Louise H. Pratt, *Lying and Poetry from Homer to Pindar*, 3.

the notion of lying for the sake of the truth, or lying for the sake of the good (Plato would not have distinguished between the two) was born out of this ancient form of entertainment. This is not to say that lying and fiction for the sake of entertainment are the same thing, because one requires more of a willing suspension of disbelief than the other. Rather, both activities are different manifestations of the same fundamental thing: the use of falsehood for the sake of affecting our understanding of the truth.

Beyond the value that was placed on deception for its ability to serve the truth, it was also believed to be indicative of strong mental faculties. This is well illustrated in the *Hippias Minor*, where Socrates and Hippias debate whether intentional *pseudea* are better than unintentional *pseudea*. The debate could also be framed in terms of whether liars or truthful people are better (in the sense of being more righteous or just). In this dialogue, Plato presents us with a Socrates who one may arguably have trouble taking seriously. By the end of the dialogue, it appears that both Hippias and the reader have no choice but to concede the preposterous conclusions (conclusions which even Socrates admits he has trouble believing⁸⁹) that the liar and the honest man are the same, and that one who tells falsehoods voluntarily is a more just person than one who tells falsehoods involuntarily. It would be easy not to take Socrates seriously in this dialogue for at least two reasons: 1) his tone at the end of the dialogue, having just humiliated Hippias with his signature *elenchus* method, may be read in an ironic manner, and 2) Socrates has to contradict one of his most well-

⁸⁹ Plato, "Lesser Hippias," in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co. 1997) 376c.

known tenets in order to reach the conclusions that he does. The first point really depends on how one chooses to read the dialogue, but (regarding the second point) Socrates is well known for espousing the view that no one does wrong willingly or knowingly. This view is brought up in the *Gorgias*, but also alluded to in *The Apology*, where Socrates states that it is impossible for him to have corrupted the youth of Athens intentionally.⁹⁰ In the *Hippias Minor*, Socrates goes so far as to say that “the one who voluntarily misses the mark and does what is shameful and unjust... would be no other than the good man.”⁹¹ This is clearly a glaring contradiction in Socrates’ thoughts; however, the reasoning that Socrates uses to arrive at that conclusion may offer some helpful insight into his larger theory concerning truth and deception.

The first issue Socrates and Hippias take up in the *Hippias Minor* is whether one can rightly distinguish the liar from the truthful man (whether they are two different types of people). Of course “liar” and “truthful man” are modern translations of the terms Socrates was using. Instead of “liar,” (which has the connotation of one who lies frequently or compulsively, and often for malevolent purposes), a more fitting translation of the term Socrates uses is “false man.”⁹² In this way, a “false man” is not necessarily a compulsive liar. Instead, he is “powerful and wise” in

⁹⁰ Plato, “The Apology,” in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co. 1997) 26a.

⁹¹ Plato, “Lesser Hippias,” 376b.

⁹² Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, (New York: Cornell UP, 1991) 276.

matters of lying, and has the ability to lie well if he wants to.⁹³ Similarly, the “truthful man” is the one who is most able to tell the truth about things. The false man is powerful and wise because he has knowledge (or possesses truth) of the skill-set he has at his disposal (deception). Knowledge of how to lie well, for Socrates, necessitates knowledge of the truth about that which one is lying.⁹⁴ It then follows that the more knowledge of the truth one has, the more things one will be able to tell the truth about, but one will also have more things one can lie, and lie consistently, about.⁹⁵ Therefore, we are left with the implied conclusion that the truthful man and the false man are really one in the same. It is important to note here that Socrates has used the term “truthful” in a way that is subtly different from how many would use it today. When we typically say someone is “truthful,” or has the quality of “truthfulness,” we tend to mean that person is “honest,” as in “one who is most likely to tell us what they believe to be true, even when they do not have to.” For Socrates being “truthful” is really about possessing truth, not about relaying it to others. Understanding this difference is crucial if we are to recognize how certain aspects of our moral vocabulary have shifted since the ancient Greeks. According to Plato’s definitions, his argument works quite well, but according to our modern understanding, his conclusions are almost comical (perhaps one might suggest that his conclusions were also meant to be comical in his own time).

⁹³ Plato, “Lesser Hippias,” 366b.

⁹⁴ Plato, “Lesser Hippias,” 367a.

⁹⁵ Plato, “Lesser Hippias,” *ibid.*

Socrates takes his argument further by arguing that the “false man” who tells falsehoods intentionally is more just than one who tells unintentional *pseudea*. Socrates holds that when a soul is skilled in a craft (e.g. playing the flute), when it misses the mark (plays a wrong note) or does something shameful, it is doing it intentionally, whereas the more “worthless” soul makes mistakes due to its own inadequacy (its worthlessness).⁹⁶ He states: 1) justice is the power of the soul, and knowledge is power, 2) the more power a soul has, the more just it will be, 3) the more knowledge the soul has, the more powerful it will be, 4) therefore, the more knowledgeable soul is the more just soul.⁹⁷ Hence, since it is better to not have any ignorance in the soul (ignorance is a lack of knowledge, power, and justice in the soul), it follows that a more just soul will only deceive intentionally, because if it unintentionally deceives, that would be due to ignorance on the part of the soul.⁹⁸ This is a marvelously tricky argument, because one may easily fail to notice that Socrates makes knowledge and justice interchangeable with power early on, thus allowing him to reach his desired conclusion. The immediate conclusion of the argument is that those who tell intentional falsehoods are more just than those who tell unintentional ones; however, the larger conclusion that can be drawn from this discussion is much more far-reaching: that possessing more truth makes one more just, even if one manipulates that truth.

⁹⁶ Plato, “Lesser Hippias,” 375b-c.

⁹⁷ Plato, “Lesser Hippias,” 375e.

⁹⁸ Plato, “Lesser Hippias,” *ibid*.

We can see that lying and deception inspired mixed feelings in Greek society. On the one hand, there was a certain amount of respect for the ability to lie well, in that it was an indication that one was intelligent and crafty. On the other hand, while the Greeks were entertained by deceptive behavior, they believed that lying to others in their community was generally vicious. The degree to which one was truthful was a reflection of the moral superiority of the *polis* and of the individual. Even the notion of keeping secrets, as Pericles mentioned, was seen as dishonest and, thus, culpable. Arguably, as citizens would participate in politics, they would carry this social sentiment into the political realm, but as the stakes changed, so would people's perspectives.

❖*Political Lies*❖

That lying in politics was still seen as having some negative weight is evidenced by Thucydides' account of the Mytilenean debate, where Diodotus identifies a striking feature of the Greek politics of his day: widespread distrust of politicians (and their motivations) which leaves them in a position where the truth is no longer acceptable to the public.⁹⁹ He declares, "a state of affairs has been reached where a good proposal honestly put forward is just as suspect as something thoroughly bad, and the result is that just as the speaker who advocates some monstrous measure has to win over the people by deceiving them, so also a man with good advice to give has to tell lies if he expects to be believed."¹⁰⁰ This implies that the negative weight of the lie is not something a good politician would willingly carry

⁹⁹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, bk 3. 43.

¹⁰⁰ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, *ibid.*

on his shoulders, yet it is one he would have to be prepared to carry if he were to take part in the politics of the time. In this manner, lying was seen as a necessary evil.

Deception was practically necessary for the sake of the good.

Nowhere is this made clearer than in Plato's *Republic*, with the figure of the philosopher king, who rather paradoxically was meant to be a lover of truth on the one hand and a utilizer of falsehoods on the other. However, before we can properly examine this contradiction (and, perhaps, also ascertain whether it is one), it is necessary to understand the larger role that deception plays in the construction of Plato's ideal state, which one might quite rightly say begins with a lie-- the noble (or grand) lie. The "noble lie," is our translation of the original Greek phrase *gennaion pseudos*. Now, from our earlier discussion on *pseudea*, one may point out that *gennaion pseudos* does not necessarily have to mean "noble lie" (it could mean "noble falsehood," which has a less intentional connotation to it), but if we look at the context in which Plato advocates utilizing this measure (along with the other kinds of *pseudea* he supports), it would be hard not to translate it as a "lie" of some kind (an intentional falsehood). This becomes somewhat more apparent merely by examining the term *gennaion*, which can also have multiple translations. It is typically translated as "grand," or "noble," which itself may have a dual meaning. On the one hand, "noble" can refer to a kind of loftiness or moral righteousness, but on the other hand it can also refer to something that is aristocratic or royal in origin. Both would be fitting to apply to the *gennaion pseudos* described by Socrates, because it is certainly a lie told with the intention of protecting the greater interest of the *polis*, and it is a lie

that the political elite (the philosopher kings) would have to tell to the populace. Beyond the civic meanings surrounding our term “noble,” G.R.F. Ferrari points out that *gennaion* can also have a connotation of magnitude, comparing the ancient Greek word to “grand” in the sense of “grand larceny,” which may change our translation of the phrase to something like a “massive, no-doubt-about-it lie,” or a “true-blue lie.”¹⁰¹ These translations are just as applicable to Plato’s phrase, because the noble lie is of a truly great magnitude.

The noble lie can be broken up into at least two parts: 1) the autochthonous birth of the populace, and 2) the myth of the metals. Malcolm Schofield suggests that these are two related myths,¹⁰² but I would argue that this goes too far. Emphasizing the separateness of these two elements of the noble lie may lead one to overlook how they support one another’s functions in certain crucial ways. Hence, it seems fairer to say that the noble lie constitutes one myth with at least two parts to it. Firstly, all the citizens (including the rulers and the guardians, or auxiliaries) have to be convinced that their lives up until this point (consisting of their state-controlled education, life experiences, and general upbringing) were simply a dream.¹⁰³ It is important to stop here and recognize that in order for Socrates to make his fiction into reality, he needed to make reality into fiction first (meaning he had to dissuade the populace from their belief in reality as they knew it, in order to construct a new, fake reality). This is arguably one of the essential first steps of any misinformation or propaganda

¹⁰¹ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. G.R.F. Ferrari (Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 2001). 107.

¹⁰² Malcolm Schofield, “The Noble Lie,” 138

¹⁰³ Plato, *The Republic*, 414d.

campaign, in that the population must have that which they unwaveringly believe (their political reality) pulled out from underneath them; i.e. a psychological deconstruction for the purpose of constructing a new, controlled, mass psyche. The citizens are told that during all their imagined experiences, they were actually being “formed,” and “raised” underneath the earth along with all their tools, weapons and tangible possessions.¹⁰⁴ Then, the citizens are born from the earth as an autochthonous brotherhood, with the dual imperatives of protecting their land (the earth from which they were born) as they would their own mother, and of maintaining a familial relationship with their fellow citizens (regarded as their brothers and sisters).¹⁰⁵ One may begin to question Socrates’ sanity at this point, but one should remember that this seemed far-fetched even to Socrates, who initially expresses a degree of embarrassment before he gives his account of the noble lie.¹⁰⁶ All of this paves the way for the second part of the myth, which is that, while the citizens were being formed in the earth, God used mixtures of different metals in everyone’s constitution such that those made from gold were to be the rulers (gold being the most valuable), those made of silver were to be auxiliaries, and those made of iron and bronze were to be farmers or craftsmen.¹⁰⁷ This serves to justify a hierarchical community structure, but it is a hierarchy that is based on the natures of the citizens (“natures” meaning something similar to their natural aptitudes, and moral

¹⁰⁴ Plato, *The Republic*, 414e.

¹⁰⁵ Plato, *The Republic*, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Plato, *The Republic*, 414d.

¹⁰⁷ Plato, *The Republic*, 415a.

characters). The citizens are told that, because they are all related as members of the autochthonous brotherhood, any mixture of metals can give birth to a silver, gold, iron or bronze offspring, and the parents must be eternally vigilant in recognizing the metal present in the soul of the child (i.e. the parents must discover what class in the hierarchy the child is best suited for) so that it can be placed in the class its nature deserves.¹⁰⁸ The fate of the *polis* rests in this vigilant watch because the citizens are also told a “prophecy,” which states that if a soul of iron or bronze rises to the throne, it will be the end of the city.¹⁰⁹ This means that the hierarchy is given a divine justification, while still allowing for social mobility based on natural aptitude (which also has a divine origin), and this social mobility is the key to the community’s advancement and survival.

One appreciates the magnitude of the noble lie on reading the passage where Socrates says, “We want one single, grand lie which will be believed by everybody--including the rulers, ideally, but failing that the rest of the city.”¹¹⁰ This is not to say that Socrates was suggesting that the rulers should only lie once. Clearly, Plato’s ideal state requires that everyone be deceived by the same falsehood and, failing that, the rulers should still make it their business to ensure that the rest of the city believes it for the sake of achieving justice in the state and justice in the souls of the citizens. The noble lie does far more to unite the citizenry than merely putting them in the same deceived state though, because the fact that everyone has to believe it is only as

¹⁰⁸ Plato, *The Republic*, 415b-c.

¹⁰⁹ Plato, *The Republic*, 415c.

¹¹⁰ Plato, *The Republic*, 414c.

important as the implications of that shared belief. While grappling with the complexity and significance of the noble lie, Malcolm Schofield recognizes that it securely grounds the identity of the populace in the land, making the lie a “myth of national identity.”¹¹¹ Beyond this, it strengthens filial ties among members of the community, justifies roles in society and social mobility based on natural aptitude, and serves the existential purpose of giving meaning and direction to the citizens’ lives (telling them what is valuable and what is worth protecting).¹¹² However, these effects seem to focus on the community, and it is important to realize another result of the noble lie: that it also serves the purpose of solidifying the power of a privileged political elite (those with the golden natures). Hence the noble lie is not solely altruistic.

To rule effectively, the philosopher kings who love truth more than any honor or prize, must use deception. They must use a noble lie (one they may believe or not) to control the collective psyche of the citizens. These statements seem internally flawed however. One would expect a philosopher who is so devoted to truth to have some qualms with intentionally relaying false information to the public. Also, a philosopher would arguably be more skilled in discovering falsehoods and questioning improbable claims when presented to him, and would therefore be an unlikely candidate for accepting the noble lie. In regards to the latter issue, it is not essential for the philosopher kings to believe the noble lie; they just have to propagate it. One might suggest that they could take part in self-deception, so as to really

¹¹¹ Malcolm Schofield, “The Noble Lie,” 138.

¹¹² Malcolm Schofield, “The Noble Lie,” 154-155.

dedicate themselves to the falsehood, yet this seems unlikely. One may interpret Socrates as establishing a hierarchy of different forms of deception based on their moral value. He speaks of what he calls “true falsehood,” where one is deceived in one’s soul, or where one “has been deceived, and is now in ignorance, that he holds and possesses the falsehood right there in his soul.”¹¹³ Ignorance of the fact that one has been deceived or that one holds false beliefs may apply equally to describe self-deception (where one knows the truth, yet wishes to believe otherwise), or delusion (where one does not know the truth, and hence honestly believes in one’s fictional reality), but there is no doubt that Socrates believes this type of deception to be the worst as it is hated by men as well as by the Gods.¹¹⁴ Then, there is the noble lie which Socrates refers to as a “necessary falsehood,”¹¹⁵ but this may prompt one to ask: necessary for what? It is not only necessary for the good of the rulers, but also necessary for the good of the citizenry and the land; it is a lie supposedly told in the interest of all. Finally, there is what he calls “verbal falsehood,” or “useful lies,”¹¹⁶ which represent the majority of the lies the philosopher kings would use.

Examining useful lies further will give us greater insight into how we might resolve the seeming contradiction mentioned earlier (regarding lying truth-lovers). One might say that it is because the rulers love truth that they are entrusted with the ability to lie in general. Socrates describes useful lies as “useful in the same way as

¹¹³ Plato, *The Republic*, 382b.

¹¹⁴ Plato, *The Republic*, 382b-c.

¹¹⁵ Plato, *The Republic*, 414b

¹¹⁶ Plato, *The Republic*, 382c-d.

medicine is useful.”¹¹⁷ He then reasons that, in order for truth to be maintained as an integral value in the city, falsehood (in a similar vein to how medicine is controlled and used) should only be utilized by specialists- the philosopher kings.¹¹⁸ Apart from these select few, everyone else in the city is forbidden from lying on the grounds that it is subversive.¹¹⁹ This puts the philosopher kings above the law in some respects in that they may choose not to practice what they preach. Interestingly, those who are to take part in politics in Plato’s ideal state (which necessarily involves the use of deception) would have to rely on the hatred of dishonesty among the citizenry. Hence, even Plato perpetuates the view that lying is wrong on the societal level, but that is because he recognizes that such a perspective would serve the effective use of deception in politics.

❖ *The Asymmetry Between Social and Political Lies* ❖

It seems fair to suggest that there is a disconnect between the perspective of the philosopher kings and the collective perspective of the society they rule over when it comes to matters of lying and deception. As mentioned earlier, the rulers are part of a political elite that is, in this sense, above the law they hold their subjects to (lying is strictly forbidden to the citizens). I would argue that this speaks to the point about what it means to lie, and under what conditions liars operate. A successful lie necessitates one of at least two prerequisites: one must either have the privilege of possessing the trust of others, or one must have the ability to communicate with

¹¹⁷ Plato, *The Republic*, 382d.

¹¹⁸ Plato, *The Republic*, 389b.

¹¹⁹ Plato, *The Republic*, 389d.

others who assume the honesty of those they interact with. One could have both of these, but both is not necessary in order to lie (e.g. I might not have your trust, and I might use that lack of trust by making a claim that I believe you will assume is a lie so as to manipulate your thoughts, thus deceiving you). In short, liars take advantage of an expectation of honesty on the part of others (those being lied to). Sissela Bok points to this in her book, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*, when she discusses the asymmetry between liars and the lied to. She writes, “Perspective makes the biggest difference. Liars are persuaded by their own excuses to a degree that seems incredible to others.”¹²⁰ This may be because, in the process of lying, there is a complex psychological calculus that takes place in order to justify the lie being told. A liar may also introduce self-deception into his thought process so as to convince himself of his well-meaning intentions, or of the lack of bad consequences that can result from carrying out the lie.¹²¹ Bok also identifies several other key considerations a liar may either intentionally or unintentionally overlook such as how lying might affect the liar personally (his reputation, sense of integrity, and also whether his “psychological barriers” to lying may be more likely to fail him in the future).¹²² Whatever the liar’s reasons may be, the lied-to are not as likely to accept those reasons should they be made known, and Bok holds that this may be due to the inability of the lied-to to accurately assess whether the liar’s intentions are truly being conveyed (the liar could be lying about his “good” reasons, and could have meant to

¹²⁰ Sissela Bok, *Lying: MCPPL*, 86.

¹²¹ Sissela Bok, *Lying: MCPPL*, 84.

¹²² Sissela Bok, *Lying: MCPPL*, 24-25.

do serious harm).¹²³ Hence, lying (seen from the perspective of the lied-to) lays the groundwork for a distrust of lying generally. This may account for the difference between how the ancient Greeks applied their moral framework to social lies as opposed to political lies. By participating in government, one takes on higher stakes than what are typically relevant in social or domestic matters. In a position of power, telling a lie may seem unavoidable (especially when politicians attribute the best of intentions to themselves); however, in every-day interactions, similar lies may seem simply unacceptable. Hence, society takes on the perspective of the lied-to, and the political realm (due to a fear of the consequences of telling the truth) becomes an environment that is conducive to lying.

❖ *A Nietzschean Perspective on Platonic Notions of the Lie* ❖

It is interesting to consider what Nietzsche might have thought about Plato's theories concerning lying, since there is arguably a great deal of common ground between them. Nietzsche certainly had plenty to say concerning Plato, believing him to be a sinner against the affirmation of life. He claims that Plato was one of the early originators of the notions that truth is ultimately divine, and that truth is God, which both rely on the existence of another, metaphysical, realm in order to lend these ideas any meaning (which, as discussed in chapter 1, make these values of truth and God life negating).¹²⁴ However, Nietzsche seems to give credit to Plato, believing him to have been an expert on what it truly means to lie.¹²⁵ It could be suggested that

¹²³ Sissela Bok, *Lying: MCPPL*, 87.

¹²⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, 152.

¹²⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, 137.

Nietzsche believed Plato possessed this knowledge, because he understood that lying can possess value; lying can serve the good and can provide meaning and direction for people's lives. The noble lie, itself, was an attempt to fulfill what Plato saw as the purpose of the state (to achieve a perfect degree of moral and psychological health in the citizens) through deception. Also, there are grounds to suggest that Nietzsche concurred with Plato in his characterization of lying as a skill-set, and something that one could practice with excellence (or "virtue"). In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche espouses the claim that people tell the truth, rather than lie, simply because "it is easier; for lying demands invention, dissimulation, and a good memory."¹²⁶ Clearly, lying well is something Nietzsche and Plato would not trust a great many to be capable of, yet one might question whether Nietzsche would have trusted Plato to lie responsibly.

One might interpret Plato's construction of the noble lie to be an attempt to create a monumental history for his ideal citizens. The myth of the metals presents a mythologized notion of the past in an attempt to justify the existence and social hierarchy of the citizens within the state. Now, while Socrates or Plato may claim that the noble lie (as well as the numerous other lies the guardians would have to tell) could be told for the purpose of the greater good, or for the benefit of all, there is an ominous message beneath the surface of the *Republic* when taken in tandem with certain other works by Plato. One must not forget to ask what harm the noble lie, or any of the lies Plato's ideal rulers tell, might cause. The goal of the philosopher, for

¹²⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, Cambridge UP. 1996) 40.

Socrates, is to pursue the truth. He does this by loving knowledge, and following the truth no matter where it takes him. He must question the truths held by others as well as himself. This was exemplified by the very life of Socrates. He practiced these activities as a lifestyle and preached the benefits of it even upon pain of death during his own trial. In fact, it is in Plato's account of Socrates' trial (the *Apology*) where Socrates famously states that "the unexamined life is not worth living for men."¹²⁷ Yet, everything about Socrates' ideal state, down to the education and upbringing of its citizens, seems structured in such a way so as to deny the average citizen (and even the philosopher kings to a degree) the ability to question and examine. Plato writes, "the overseers of our city must keep a firm grip on our system of education... they must reject any radical innovation in physical or musical education, preserving them as far as they can unchanged."¹²⁸ With the telling of the noble lie, Plato saw himself as creating the ideal, or telos, for man, and any change to the state upon its establishment would be for the worse. The noble lie negates the possibility of questioning the structure of society and one's place within it, because, once one's class is finally established, one would not be allowed to progress to a different class. The censorship of the arts and poetry (arguably a form of deception because it requires intentional concealment) is meant to stop individuals from questioning the communally shared moral values the state and its rulers rely on. Again, Plato writes, "our guardians should be... the true architects of freedom of our city... it is essential

¹²⁷ Plato, "The Apology," 38a.

¹²⁸ Plato, *The Republic*, 424b.

that they never do or imitate anything else.”¹²⁹ According to Socrates’ own logic, then, despite all the security and moral righteousness the citizens might possess, his ideal state makes their lives not worth living. Furthermore, according to Nietzschean logic, Plato’s ideal citizens (due to the lies they would be made to accept) would never have progressed beyond the unquestioning acquiescence of the stage of the camel. By being dissuaded from ever challenging the commonly accepted values, even Plato’s philosopher kings would be little more than followers at the end of the day. An alternate interpretation to this is that Nietzsche would have claimed that the noble lie could never have worked if it was implemented, because (while there will always be a herd) there might always be one person who would be willing to challenge the system and show a willingness to create new values over, and beyond, the status quo. At least, one might say that Nietzsche would have hoped that such individuals could always exist. This being said, I would argue that lying in the monumental fashion that Nietzsche prescribes, and that Plato attempted, can serve political life and benefit the community in that it can produce a valuable myth from which values and meaning can be drawn. Yet, the moment such a myth constrains the citizenry (by disallowing the possibility of them being able to draw values from other sources that may even conflict with the values of the state), it ceases to allow for the on-going evolution of culture and meaning-making, which is necessary for the service of life. The relationship between the rulers and their subjects is no longer predicated upon securing the opportunity for personal development of normative value in life;

¹²⁹ Plato, *The Republic*, 395c.

rather, the basis of the relationship becomes the maintenance of a homogenous value system, and this is no longer realizable in the pluralistic societies of liberal democracies.

❖*The Rise of Absolutism*❖

It would not be until several hundred years later that the absolute rejection of all lying would be considered in the work of St Augustine. It should be said that Judaism attributed a negative weight to lying in general long before Augustine did (the ninth commandment is often considered to forbid lying). However, certain lies were considered exceptions to the rule, specifically when they were meant to “preserve the peace of the household.”¹³⁰ Disincentives to sinning and incentives to obey the commandments were meant to come in the dual forms of divine punishment for evil acts, and rewards from God respectively, but these incentives were meant to be realized in the course of one’s corporeal existence. There is not much mention of the “afterlife” in the Old Testament, when compared to the New Testament. It is here that we may start to gain insight into what was singular to Christianity that enabled St Augustine’s absolutism. Bok picks up on this when she writes, “any complete prohibition of lying... must, in order for it to be reasonable, rely on some belief that the lie is associated with a fate ‘worse than death’.”¹³¹ I would add to this that one also needs the positive incentive of a reward better than anything one could receive in this life to really inspire a strict adherence to such an absolute prohibition. The Christians may arguably have found such a “carrot and stick” approach in the works

¹³⁰ Sissela Bok, *Lying: MCPPL*, 45.

¹³¹ Sissela Bok, *Lying: MCPPL*, 44.

of Plato. Certain dogmatic beliefs of the Christians were inherited from Judaism (including the ten commandments), but the notion of a perfect other-worldly realm (heaven), and the guarantee that one would be judged after death, and rewarded or punished accordingly, may be seen in Plato's work. One need only look at the "Tale of Er" in book ten of the *Republic* in order to see the similarities between Plato's and the Christians' version of the afterlife. Here, we see how being just in life and learning how to be virtuous have a direct relationship with the kind of existence one can expect in the afterlife. While Plato was not the only one to have conceptualized an afterlife in which one is judged (the Egyptians also had a similar belief), one must not overlook the possible contribution he made to Christianity. Also, Plato was well-known for speaking of a world of perfect forms, of which everything we experience in this world (including normative ideals such as justice and truth) is an inferior copy or attempted embodiment, and it was meant to be a world we were aware of before birth, and one we would come to know again after death (this idea served as the justification for Plato's theory of learning being a process of remembering). It was seen earlier that Plato made the truth equivalent to the good, hence it would be conceivable to simplify Plato's world of forms into a divine paradise that one's soul could travel to upon death, as long as one had spent one's life perfecting one's soul so that one could reach exceedingly closer to this perfect existence. In plain terms, in order to work, Christianity needed to appeal to the existence of a world beyond our own, that we cannot know in life. Furthermore, Nietzsche also writes of how Christianity mixed other Platonic ideals (e.g. the idea of a thing being good "in

itself,” and the “pure” or just spirit) into its doctrines, essentially becoming “Platonism for the people.”¹³² This being said, Christianity eventually became more dominant than the polytheistic religions of the Greeks and Romans, in what Nietzsche called a “slave revolt in morality,” (where those who were formerly slaves to the polytheistic, aristocratic masters inverted the moral order making the common, weaker man “good” and their oppressors “evil”).¹³³ To understand how Christianity could command such strict adherence, and actually make a prohibition of all lying tenable, we have to assess the truth of Nietzsche’s claim that the old systems of power (the nobility of Greece and Rome) had been defeated by the Judeo-Christianization of the west. He writes “consider to whom one bows down in Rome itself today... three Jews, as is known, and one Jewess [Jesus, Peter, Paul, and Mary].”¹³⁴ Christianity had become so widespread, that the old moral codes of the Romans were able to be pushed aside. Was this really a defeat on the part of the Romans? Nietzsche failed to appreciate how Christianity could have served the old systems of power. In short, it was Emperor Constantine the Great who famously converted to Christianity and instated the Edict of Milan which allowed for religious tolerance to become part of Roman policy. Rome, up until that point, had been vigorously seeking out and crucifying Christians for their beliefs, but it was arguably when Constantine recognized that Christianity could serve a political purpose that he “allowed” the

¹³² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House Inc. 1989) 2.

¹³³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, 36-37.

¹³⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, 53.

practice of tolerance. Constantine wanted to consolidate the Roman empire under a shared belief system (to avoid the divisiveness of competing religions), and he thought Christianity was particularly well-suited for the task. It had incentives that did not only apply to this life; it kept citizens obedient for fear of what would happen to them in the next life. With that, citizens had no choice but to live strictly according to religious doctrines (which included a ban of all lying) if they were to maintain their reputations as good citizens in the eyes of the Emperor and God.

Augustine took to heart the passage in Psalm 5:7, which reads, “Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity: thou wilt destroy all that speak a lie.”¹³⁵ Augustine used a definition of lying which had existed for some time: “he lies who has one thing in his mind (or heart) and says something else in words or with some other kind of signifying act.”¹³⁶ Thankfully, the definition only pertains to instances where a person intends to give or convey what he believes to be false information to another (as opposed to instances where one accidentally gives false information to another). Augustine’s definition also, rather interestingly, incorporates non-verbal communication into the spectrum of lying, so that one can lie via actions in addition to speaking or writing (we will see in later chapters how other theorists overlooked this possibility). Augustine gave a comprehensive list of the different types of lies in his piece entitled *On Lying*, where it is traditionally thought that he divided the different types of lies into eight categories, but I will add a few more because he

¹³⁵ St Augustine, “Against Lying,” in *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* by Sissela Bok (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 252.

¹³⁶ Paul J. Griffiths, *Lying: An Augustinian Theology of Duplicity*. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010) 27.

discusses them in *Against Lying*. The list may be read as: 1) lies told about religion, or in teaching religion, 2) lying that helps no one, and harms someone, 3) lying that helps one, but harms another without “physical defilement,” 4) lying for the sake of lying (which Augustine calls “the real lie”), 5) lies told to please others (e.g. flattery), 6) lies that harm no one and benefit someone (e.g. a white lie), 7) lies that harm no one and benefit someone by saving his life, or by protecting someone’s opportunity to repent, 8) lies that harm no one which are meant to protect an individual from defilement (or loss of purity).¹³⁷ It is interesting to note a few things about the traditional list of lies St Augustine presents. It seems fair to say that there is some understanding of degrees of severity in his list, especially since he begins with the type of lie (lies about religion) that he claims is “deadly,” while the last lie in his list he refers to as “wont to evoke considerable discussion.”¹³⁸ That does not mean, however, that he was prepared to excuse or justify such lies, because he does write “it is not true that sometimes we ought to lie. And what is not true we should never try to persuade anyone to believe.”¹³⁹ This is at least partially because he believed that excusing lies would lead to a proliferation of lying,¹⁴⁰ which could either be interpreted as justifying one lie will lead to other (more severe) lies being justified by an individual, or telling one lie will necessitate other lies being told in order to maintain previous lies. These are two ways we might consider the aggregate effect of

¹³⁷ St Augustine, “On Lying,” in *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* by Sissela Bok (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 250-251.

¹³⁸ St Augustine, “On Lying,” *ibid.*

¹³⁹ St Augustine, “Against Lying,” 255.

¹⁴⁰ St Augustine, “Against Lying,” 254.

telling lies on an individual basis, but the aggregate effect of whole societies lying will be taken up later in my discussion on Kant's universalist ethics. Perjury was also a severe type of lie for Augustine, because one was not just lying-- one was also taking God's name in vain.¹⁴¹ Augustine additionally had some more curious ideas of what constituted a lie. This can be seen when he condemns the Priscillianists (a rival Christian sect) for trying to justify lying to their neighbors via their interpretation of the Bible.¹⁴² Augustine considered the Priscillianists to be heretics, and when asked whether one should be able to draw out these heretics using lies, he states, "how can I suitably proceed against lies by lying."¹⁴³ It seems here that Augustine is not just calling the Priscillianists liars, because they think that lying is excusable under certain circumstances. One might argue that Augustine is calling Priscillianists liars because they are heretics in his eyes; non-believers or believers of the wrong faith. Hence, one would have to conclude that disbelief or merely holding a mistaken belief concerning religion constitutes lying for Augustine. This is clearly a very dangerous notion. While a person may not have any interest in leading you to believe something he does not believe himself, that person may still be guilty of sinning and would thus be deserving of God's punishment. Augustine's refusal to permit any lying contributed to an existence in which people were forced to abide by strict rules of conduct (even at the expense of their own life or bodily integrity) in order to maintain their status as "good" people. It seems a fair observation to make that when the range of what could

¹⁴¹ St Augustine, "Against Lying," 254.

¹⁴² St Augustine, "Against Lying," 255.

¹⁴³ St Augustine, "Against Lying," 252.

be considered moral action for a person becomes more and more limited (something that happens when political and societal institutions attempt to constrain citizens to homogenous normative values), an equilibrium point is reached where an individual's subservience to a moral code is exceedingly exchanged for the pursuit of personal freedom. With the maintenance of rules, there naturally arises the search for loopholes, and with loopholes, the discovery of exceptions. In Nietzschean terms, when a value is recognized to be impracticable, or untenable given the conditions in which one is trying to live up to that value, it breeds a kind of resentment towards, and a rejection of, that value. Augustine's absolutism arguably created the ideal setting in which lying could return and be raised to an unprecedented level of legitimacy as a political tool.

Chapter 3: From Absolutism to Realism

In this chapter, I shall examine how Augustinian absolutism lost its appeal in favor of a more questioning and rationalizing perspective which gradually evolved into a secular understanding of what lies are, and how they could be utilized in the political sphere. With Augustine's death in 430AD, the Church retained an absolutist perspective with regards to lying with which every "man of God" had to contend. His dictates concerning the condemnation of lying were unquestioningly accepted as a necessary foundation on which the Christian Church could flourish. It was not until the work of St Thomas Aquinas emerged in the 13th century that the absolutist stance began to decay. Aquinas' work challenged the absolutist view that all lies were equally abhorrent by proposing that lies carried with them varying degrees of sin and, thus, culpability. This more open perspective, along with the views of contemporary thinkers such as Dante, paved the way for later theorists to start openly assessing the Church's own ability to follow an absolutist perspective, and also the degree to which religious doctrine ought to affect political judgments. In doing so, other theorists such as Machiavelli, Hobbes and Hugo Grotius, were inspired to re-examine the role of lying in politics and social life, along with the relationship of the state with its citizens. I will argue that Aquinas began a great movement toward the rejection of the rejection of lying, and that his efforts would eventually lead future theorists to conceptualize lying in a more positivist and realist light.

❖*Lying and Caritas*❖

Aquinas was born in 1225AD, long after the death of St Augustine, by which time absolutism had ample opportunity to solidify itself as part of Church doctrine. This is not to say that no one disagreed with Augustine during this period, but it was arguably Aquinas who was the first to adequately articulate an alternative understanding of lying in his *Summa Theologica*. He sought to clarify many of the on-going issues within the ecclesiastical community, among which were questions of how to characterize types of lying, and whether all lies really were, as Augustine had claimed, grievous sins. Aquinas did not directly contradict Augustine, for that could have led to ostracism by the Church. Rather, I would argue that Aquinas extended Augustine's work to produce a new perspective that had been informed by extensive knowledge of Plato and Aristotle (who Aquinas reverently referred to as "the Philosopher"¹⁴⁴).

Aquinas' system of categorizing lies seems to be an amalgamation of the division of lies we see in Aristotle's work together with the different types of lies mentioned in Plato's *Republic*. In our discussion of Plato's *Republic* in chapter two, we were able to identify that Plato divided lying into at least three types: 1) "true" lies (which could either be self-deception, or delusion), 2) "necessary" lies (lies told for the sake of the greater good or for the sake of the truth), and 3) "useful" lies (verbal falsehoods told to secure some advantage). In addition, we also see that Aristotle mentions several different forms of lying: 1) lies told in matters of justice (where the stakes are high, and telling a lie will lead to a severe injustice), 2) lies told in fiscal

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologica 2.2.ques no.110, art. 2." in *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* by Sissela Bok (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 255.

matters (which Aristotle seemed to think was a smaller matter than a lie in regards to justice), 3) boasting (which, again, Aristotle seems to view as more trivial than a lie told in matters of justice), 4) mock-modesty (which could be considered similar to our notion of self-depreciation, and is something that Aristotle seems to permit provided it is practiced in moderation), and finally 5) a lie told for the sake of doing the right thing when the golden mean cannot be clearly identified (which was inferred from Aristotle's willingness to choose the lesser of two evils under certain circumstances).¹⁴⁵ Aquinas claims that lies can be divided into three types: 1) officious (a lie told to help or save another person), 2) jocose (a lie told in jest or in order to please someone), and 3) mischievous (where the lie is told in order to harm another).¹⁴⁶ In response to an objection concerning the legitimacy of this system of categorization, Aquinas responds that he found these characterizations in the bible; specifically, from "a gloss on Ps.V.7."¹⁴⁷ However, a quick "gloss" over Psalms V:7 would reveal that there is no such distinction regarding lying made in that passage, or elsewhere in Psalms V. Perhaps Aquinas was using a different version of the Psalms in which that distinction was made; however, the passage he cites was the same passage that Augustine used to justify the belief that God hates all who tell a lie, hence (at the very least) it could not have been an obvious conclusion for Aquinas to draw. A more likely scenario is one in which Aquinas came to his conclusion concerning how to categorize lies by drawing from the Platonic notions of the

¹⁴⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1109a34-35.

¹⁴⁶ Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologica 2.2.ques no.110, art. 2," 256.

¹⁴⁷ Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologica 2.2.ques no.110, art. 2," *ibid.*

necessary lie, and the useful lie (which could yield something similar to the officious lie), and the Aristotelian concepts of mock-modesty and boastfulness (which could qualify as jocose lies), and the lie told in order to do injustice (a mischievous lie). However, Aquinas could not have risked revealing his “pagan” source of inspiration, and had to justify his beliefs according to scripture, which is ironic considering Nietzsche’s perspective on the origins of Christianity in Platonic thought.

In addition to persuading others of the legitimacy of his ideas, Aquinas had to show that his thoughts could fit into the ethical framework of the existing Church. He achieved this by demonstrating how his characterizations of lies could apply to St Augustine’s list of different lies. He claims that the first three types of St Augustine’s lies fall under the category of mischievous lies, because they aim to offend God and harm others, the fifth lie is a jocose lie, and the last three are officious lies.¹⁴⁸ The only type of Augustinian lie that does not fit neatly into Aquinas’ framework is the fourth type of lie (where one lies simply for the sake of lying), and it seems that Aquinas implies that this kind of lie could fall under any one of his proposed categories depending on the severity of the intention and the consequences of the lie.¹⁴⁹ From our discussion of Augustine’s list of lies, the lies seem to be listed in order of diminishing harm intended to others. It is for this reason that Aquinas thought that the latter lies represented lesser sins, since he writes, “the greater the good intended, the more is the sin of lying diminished in gravity.”¹⁵⁰ More

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Aquinas, “Summa Theologica 2.2.ques no.110, art. 2,” 257.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas Aquinas, “Summa Theologica 2.2.ques no.110, art. 2,” *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Aquinas, “Summa Theologica 2.2.ques no.110, art. 2,” *ibid.*

specifically, Aquinas distinguishes between three parts that constitute the act of lying: 1) the intention, 2) the act itself, and 3) the consequences of the action.¹⁵¹ Each of these, he argues, will determine how severe the sin of a particular lie might be. The lie has an initial negative weight because it is inherently a sin (something Nietzsche readily rejected on the grounds that no activity has intrinsic value), but the intentionality behind the act and the results that follow will ultimately be the difference between having to carry out a simple penance versus spending an eternity in hell.¹⁵² Thus, Aquinas used Augustine's hierarchy of lies to his advantage by showing that his own categories could be conducive to a more complex and accurate understanding of the already established church perspective on deceit.

We should not make the mistake, however, of completely separating Aquinas' views from those of his absolutist predecessor. Aquinas agrees with Augustine that all lying is sin, but the crucial difference is that Aquinas believed that only "mischievous" lies counted as mortal sins, making all other forms of lying venial sins.¹⁵³ This is in stark contrast to Nietzsche who thought the normative value of "sin" was based on a belief in a vengeful God who pettily takes any disobedience from man as a slight against his honor.¹⁵⁴ The way Aquinas was able to distinguish between which sins were hell-worthy was by developing the Christian notion of *caritas*.

¹⁵¹ Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologica 2.2.ques no.110, art. 4," in *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* by Sissela Bok (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 259.

¹⁵² Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologica 2.2.ques no.110, art. 4," *ibid.*

¹⁵³ Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologica 2.2.ques no.110, art. 4," *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Gay Science," ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 2001), 124.

Caritas is typically translated from Latin into our word, “charity,” but that translation fails to capture the meaning of Aquinas’ term in the context he used it. *Caritas* did not mean altruistic generosity or giving to the needy as such; it meant loving God and one’s neighbor.¹⁵⁵ Aquinas argues that lying (including any one of its parts) is only a mortal sin if it conflicts with *caritas*, and-- since jocose and officious lies are told in order to benefit someone (by pleasing them or saving them from harm)-- such lies could not contradict *caritas*, leaving only mischievous lies (which aim to do harm) as mortal sins.¹⁵⁶ It should be mentioned that if a lie is told with the intention of helping someone, but then accidentally results in doing harm, Aquinas would still hold the liar responsible for having committed a mortal sin, because part of the action (the consequences) conflicted with *caritas*.¹⁵⁷ To address those who held that breaking one of the Ten Commandments was a mortal sin, Aquinas uses the notion of *caritas* to reinterpret the Ten Commandments so as to allow for some types of lies. He claims that each commandment is “directed to the love of God and our neighbor,” hence a lie only conflicts with the Ten Commandments in so far as it conflicts with charity.¹⁵⁸ In this way, we might make another important distinction between Augustine and Aquinas: Augustine justifies his absolutism in reference to God’s hatred of lying, and Aquinas does this to a degree as well, but he permits lying in cases where one is trying to contribute to or protect one’s relationships with other human beings, and

¹⁵⁵ Thomas Aquinas, “Summa Theologica 2.2.ques no.110, art. 4,” 260.

¹⁵⁶ Thomas Aquinas, “Summa Theologica 2.2.ques no.110, art. 4,” 259.

¹⁵⁷ Thomas Aquinas, “Summa Theologica 2.2.ques no.110, art. 4,” 260.

¹⁵⁸ Thomas Aquinas, “Summa Theologica 2.2.ques no.110, art. 4,” *ibid*.

God, out of love. Aquinas contributes to Augustinian theology by positing the added responsibility we owe to our fellow man, which may be indicative of influences the ancient Greeks had on Aquinas' work. The central focus of ancient Greek moral philosophy was arguably how human beings relate to one another in their actions and in their ethical beliefs. Clearly, when Christianity came to dominate the world of thought, man's relationship with God took precedence over man's relationship to other men and even the state, which had the simultaneous effect of making moral (and political) philosophy dependent on theology. Thus, the anachronistic quality of Aquinas' work may be somewhat responsible for inspiring the theorists who came after him (such as Machiavelli and Hobbes) who chose to reexamine the prioritization of religious convictions over societal obligations, helping them to arrive at the conclusion that religious imperatives do not always align with political ones.

❖*Hypocrisy in the Church*❖

Another contributing factor to the loss of precedence of absolutism in political philosophy is illustrated in medieval art and literature; specifically in the work of Dante Alighieri (1265-1321A.D.). While the Church preached absolutism, it was common knowledge that many within the church took advantage of their stations and manifested varying degrees of dishonest behavior. Since Constantine (272-337A.D.) recognized the potential in Christianity for exerting control (and, perhaps, even before), those at the head of the Church hierarchy had grown increasingly political in their aims and methods, and that often meant practicing one thing while preaching another.

Recognition of the use of deception by members of the Church is reflected in Dante's *Divina Commedia* (*Divine Comedy*). Dante demonstrates via his journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, that dishonesty warranted some of the worst punishment in the medieval mind. It is interesting to note here that Nietzsche saw Dante as still making one of the typical errors of the Christians: placing too much importance on a world beyond the one we find ourselves in. This becomes apparent when Nietzsche discusses in his *Genealogy* how Dante made the mistake of having the sign above the gateway of Hell read, "I too was created by eternal love," instead of having the inscription, "I too was created by eternal hate,"¹⁵⁹ (the implication being that both Hell and Heaven were created out of a hatred for the world and circumstances humanity actually inhabits). Dante conceptualizes Hell as having nine levels, or circles, in which different types of liars and deceivers occupy the very bottom two circles (the eighth and ninth).¹⁶⁰ In the eighth circle, we see flatterers, simonists (those who buy privileges and seats of power in the Church), and hypocrites to name a few, while the ninth circle is reserved for traitors (presumably because Satan himself was a traitor against God).¹⁶¹ It is when Virgil leads Dante through the eighth circle that we begin to appreciate how Dante felt about certain members of the Church. In Canto 19, Dante comes upon Pope Nicholas III buried upside down in the ground, which was the typical punishment for assassins in Florence in Dante's time

¹⁵⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, 49.

¹⁶⁰ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Carlyle-Wicksteed trans. (USA: Modern Library Inc. 1944) 5.

¹⁶¹ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, *ibid.*

(Nicholas III had helped to conspire against Charles of Anjou, the King of Sicily).¹⁶² Nicholas III then mistakes Dante for Pope Boniface VIII, asking, “art thou so quickly sated with that wealth, for which thou didst not fear to seize the comely Lady [the Papal See] by deceit, and then make havoc of her?”¹⁶³ Here, Dante is implying that Boniface VIII is a simonist, in that he paid to ascend to the seat of the Pope. Then, having attacked two Popes in his work, Dante resigns another Pope to Hell, Clement V. In Hell, Nicholas III describes Pope Clement V as another “Jason,” which is meant to draw a parallel between Clement V’s relationship with King Philip IV of France (the king supported Clement in ascending to the Papal See in exchange for Clement moving the Papal See from Rome to France), and the relationship between Jason and King Antiochus IV Epiphanes (i.e. Jason used bribes to convince the king to make him the Jewish high priest).¹⁶⁴

In recognizing the lengths that Church officials were willing to go in their power struggles, Dante was actually acknowledging how much the Church had transformed into a political institution, and he framed his political opinions to address this. Dante may have passed this view onto Nietzsche, who readily identifies how politicized the Church became, writing in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that the Church, “is a kind of state-- the most mendacious kind.”¹⁶⁵ Dante wanted the powers and responsibilities of the church to be kept separate from those of the Holy Roman

¹⁶² Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, 106.

¹⁶³ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, 103.

¹⁶⁴ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, 106.

¹⁶⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 132.

Empire, because he believed that only suffering would result from the Emperor's neglect of Italy to contend with the church, and the church trying to usurp the authority of the Emperor.¹⁶⁶ In other words, he wanted the church to have jurisdiction over the soul and the Emperor to have jurisdiction over the land and law, but one might also interpret Dante's work and political perspective as calling for the church to begin using methods more in accordance with what they preached (and less like those one might see in the political arena).

❖ *Unsustainable Virtù* ❖

Dante's rejection of political methods in matters of the soul seems to become inverted in the work of another great Italian theorist, Niccolò Machiavelli. Instead of holding that political practices do not belong in the world of religion, he advocated that certain religious values and practices do not belong in the political realm; among which (most importantly) is the absolute rejection of all deception. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli's personal views on lying in politics could not have been more directly articulated, or more directly at odds with the prevalent notions of moral goodness that were declared in his day. For the Greeks, the spheres of ethics and politics were not mutually exclusive, and while religion did inform their notions of the good in the ethical realm to a degree, it did not play as prominent a role in politics. With the rise of Judeo-Christianity, the ethical and political spheres were subsumed under the religious sphere, and those who supposedly had a more direct relationship with God established a monopoly over moral thought and political legitimacy. With

¹⁶⁶ C.H. Grandgent, Introduction to *The Divine Comedy*, xi.

Machiavelli, we see a strict, secular, separation of the political sphere from the religious, but (more uniquely) we see a separation of the ethical from the political. The aim of politics for Machiavelli was not as it was for Plato (to establish order and lead the citizenry as a whole toward the good); rather, the political telos was to maintain power by any means one could sustain, and this new goal would necessitate a different kind of relationship between politicians and citizens.

The relationship between a people and their government was re-conceptualized as mutually-parasitic: with rulers relying on the citizen's subservience for power and the people relying on their governments for security via sustainable political methods. The necessity of having sustainable political means at a ruler's disposal is an integral aspect of why Machiavelli banishes certain commonly held moral precepts from politics. He writes several times that the nature of the political realm is one that forces rulers to act immorally in order to maintain power.¹⁶⁷ This is due to the fact that exercising certain "virtuous" traits may threaten to diminish one's power, in turn diminishing one's ability to continue exercising that virtue. Two prime examples Machiavelli gives regarding this notion concern generosity and honesty. He reasons that, if one develops a generous nature, one would have to use one's resources in order to please others; however, as one uses up one's finite resources, one's ability to maintain similarly high levels of generosity would also decrease, and this would incur the hatred of those who have now come to expect their ruler to show them the utmost generosity.¹⁶⁸ Hence, generosity is an unsustainable virtue (or *virtù*) for

¹⁶⁷ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 62.

¹⁶⁸ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 56.

Machiavelli. Machiavelli may be seen characterizing honesty as unsustainable as well, although for different reasons. He argues that honesty may be highly detrimental to a ruler's power and that a ruler should not be bound to keep his word, because while most people themselves are easily deceived, most men are also treacherous and cannot be expected to keep their word.¹⁶⁹ This argument has subtleties that his rejection of honesty does not, since it relies solely on the threat of others taking advantage of one's virtue, and Machiavelli does not try to explain how constantly being honest may lead to a situation in which one must be dishonest in order to maintain one's reputation and the trust of others. However, one could derive such a justification by using the same rationale. Constantly being honest to one's subjects and upholding the reputation of being an honest ruler may lead to a situation where one must be dishonest in order to keep that reputation in the same manner that Diodotus discusses in the Mytilenean debate (i.e. a lack of trust in an honest politician may necessitate that the politician tell a lie). Therefore, honesty may be unsustainable in a similar way to generosity given the right circumstances.

Despite Machiavelli's belief that such traits as honesty do not belong in politics, he did believe that the appearance of such traits was a necessity. He writes, a ruler "should seem to be exceptionally merciful, trustworthy, upright, humane and devout."¹⁷⁰ These appearances are crucial for maintaining the power of the citizen's support, since Machiavelli argues that the appearances a ruler puts forward are all that the people really experience of the rulers, because we as humans tend to judge *prima*

¹⁶⁹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 62.

¹⁷⁰ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 62.

facie.¹⁷¹ However, there is one precept above all that makes appearances more important than actuality: “If a ruler, then, contrives to conquer, and to preserve the state, the means will always be judged to be honorable and be praised by everyone. For the common people are impressed by appearances and results.”¹⁷² In short, appearances are more important because, in the minds of the people, the truth of the matter comes second to what is achieved (i.e. the ends justify the means). One might recognize a near fatal flaw in this manner of reasoning, because it requires one to know the full extent of the consequences that result from one’s actions, and this is rarely (if ever) the case. Yet, the continued faith of citizens in their rulers lent support to their regimes, and this power had to be harnessed and sustained through appearances of moral righteousness and deception.

❖*The Right to Lie*❖

As political thought became increasingly secular, the concepts of right and wrong began to be influenced by the positivist notion of “rights.” Sometimes these rights were considered to be God-given (as in natural rights), whereas other forms of rights were seen as having their roots in the state. About half a century after Machiavelli, the prolific Dutch theorist, Hugo Grotius, began to examine deception in relation to rights in both the political sphere and the social sphere. In *On the Law of War and Peace*, one can distinguish some Machiavellian characteristics in Grotius’ argument. For example, when considering what types of activities may be permissible in the context of a war between nations, Grotius writes “the means employed in the

¹⁷¹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 63.

¹⁷² Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, *ibid*.

pursuit of any object must, in a great degree, derive the complexion of their moral character from the nature of the end to which they lead.”¹⁷³ However, it would be problematic to characterize Grotius as a Machiavellian theorist, because of his emphasis on the relationship between what is morally permissible and the rights that one possesses (Machiavelli barely touches on the concept of rights in his discussion of political usages of deception). Grotius states that there are different kinds of rights, including natural rights (he believed the right to defend one’s life and property to be of this kind), and what we might call “societal rights,” which he describes as “the moral power of action, which any one as a member of society possesses.”¹⁷⁴ The degrees to which someone possesses these rights, and a lie interferes with another’s rights, are the dual standards by which Grotius judges the moral quality of lies.

Before inquiring into what he thought about different types of lies, it is necessary to have a basic understanding of how Grotius believed a lie could actually violate someone else’s rights. If we consider the natural rights which Grotius advocates, we could probably imagine a situation in which a lie could deprive someone of their property or life. Aside from such circumstances, Grotius’ main justification for why a lie can violate another’s rights relies on his notion of societal rights. He seems to operate on the common sense reasoning that, for a society to exist, modes of communication are of vital importance, and in order to have understandable communication, people must have some way to convey thoughts or ideas to others in

¹⁷³ Hugo Grotius, *On the Law of War and Peace*, (Kessinger Publishing Co. June 9, 2011) bk3.chap1.secll

¹⁷⁴ Hugo Grotius, *OLW&P*, *ibid.*

an honest fashion. Grotius clearly states, “words, gestures, and signs, made use of to convey a meaning, imply an obligation, in all persons concerned, to receive and employ them in their common acceptance.”¹⁷⁵ It would be too simplistic to say that individuals in society are required to use language honestly or correctly just because they are using language within a societal setting though. Rather, Grotius believes this required use of language is based on the presupposition that we have “liberty of judgment, which men are understood, by a kind of tacit agreement, to owe to each other in their mutual intercourse.”¹⁷⁶ He argues that language was meant to facilitate and reflect our liberty of judgment in that, if we had never had this trait, there would have been no use for language in the first place.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, if language or communication is used for the purpose of manipulating or controlling the judgment of another, it offends the principles upon which it was established.

Grotius divides activities involving deception into at least three categories. He names the first two “negative,” and “positive” stratagems, but one might better understand them as “passive,” and “active” modes of deception respectively. Negative stratagems generally include “such actions, as have nothing criminal in them, though calculated to deceive,” however Grotius only refers to instances of deceit involving “dissimulation or concealment,” in order to convey his ideas.¹⁷⁸ He reasons that concealing the truth may be legal or permissible based on the principle that “you are

¹⁷⁵ Hugo Grotius, *OLW&P*, bk3.chap1.secVIII.

¹⁷⁶ Hugo Grotius, *OLW&p*, bk3.chap1.secXI.

¹⁷⁷ Hugo Grotius, *OLW&P*, *ibid*.

¹⁷⁸ Hugo Grotius, *OLW&P*, bk3.chap1.secVII.

not bound to disclose to others all that you either know or intend.”¹⁷⁹ It is probable that Grotius’ concept of negative stratagems would be met with some controversy today, because concealment still inspires much debate concerning its permissibility. On the one hand, we can clearly think of instances where concealing the truth can be illegal (as in impeding a criminal investigation), while on the other hand, most people (if not everyone) practice some form of concealment when taking part in public life. Positive stratagems involve more active modes of deception in that they do not concern what is not being said, so much as what is actually being communicated. It is under this heading that Grotius places the notion of the “lie” in its strict sense, which is meant to denote active attempts to deceive using speech, as opposed to active deceit via a non-conversational action (which he calls a “feint”).¹⁸⁰ Grotius also includes deception with the use of signs, gestures, and handwriting in this category, because they are modes of communication.¹⁸¹

As mentioned before, Grotius believed that we have an obligation to use such communication for the correct conveyance of thoughts and ideas; however, this imperative was not an unconditional one in his mind, since he addresses several instances where the imperative does not apply. The imperative to be honest does not apply to communication with children or “insane” people. Grotius argues that such individuals cannot be said to possess “liberty of judgment,” which is the basic quality

¹⁷⁹ Hugo Grotius, *OLW&P*, *ibid*.

¹⁸⁰ Hugo Grotius, *OLW&P*, bk3.chap1.secVIII.

¹⁸¹ Hugo Grotius, *OLW&P*, bk3.chap1.*ibid*.

upon which one's obligation to be honest is founded.¹⁸² Individuals may not have the right to the truth in the first place (as in the previous example), but people who do have it may also give up that right or be relieved of it. Grotius argues that a person can openly or tacitly consent to be told a falsehood (e.g. when a friend tells another something completely false to make them laugh), but one's right to the truth can also be cancelled when it comes into conflict with another right "which, in the common judgment of all men, is much more cogent."¹⁸³ It may become clear at this point that a moral calculus would be required to weigh the importance of one's rights against those of another though, and this may ultimately give rise to problems of ambiguity, such as the issue of who would get to decide which right is more important. Perhaps, in this view, it would be the job of the government to ultimately balance the rights of certain citizens against others in matters where there is no clear verdict to be passed. However, from the emphasis that Grotius places on the importance of certain natural rights, one could infer that a thief's, or a murderer's, right to the truth can be overridden when one is trying to protect a life or someone's property. Whether the thief ceases to possess his right to the truth upon committing bad acts, or he continues to possess it while it is overridden by another individual's supposedly more important right, is debatable.

Although Grotius discusses the first two types of lying (positive and negative stratagems) to a greater degree, it is still worth examining the third type of activity involving deception, which he refers to as "management," or "economy." He

¹⁸² Hugo Grotius, *OLW&P*, bk3.chap1.secXII.

¹⁸³ Hugo Grotius, *OLW&P*, bk3.chap1.secXI.

writes that, while words, gestures, and signs carry an obligation to use them honestly, “the employment of other means, coming under none of those descriptions, cannot be construed into a violation of any social contract, although some may be deceived thereby.”¹⁸⁴ He goes on to say that, “it is the real nature of the actions that is here spoken of, and not the accidental circumstances attending them: such actions for instance, as occasion no mischief; or if they do so, there is no guilt, where there is no treacherous design.”¹⁸⁵ This is not simply claiming that deception is only blameworthy if one intends to deceive, although that is part of it. We must first break these claims down into their components to understand what “management” is. He refers to actions that fall under this category as “means” which are separate from words, gestures and signs. By this, one could understand “means,” to be, “means of communication,” but then this prompts the question: what is another method of communication separate from words, gestures, and signs? We know from his other claims that whatever these means may be, it is possible to accidentally interpret them as communicating a message, when in fact there may be no such communication going on at all. One might suggest that Grotius is actually referring to one’s apparent behavior. Words, gestures and signs are things we tend to direct at others deliberately, whereas our behavior may be carried out unconsciously (e.g. having a glass of water instead of coffee in the morning, because one simply “feels like” having it). Our behavior may also communicate things to others unintentionally (e.g. one could see me having a glass of water instead of coffee, and could assume that I am sick or

¹⁸⁴ Hugo Grotius, *OLW&P*, bk3.chap1.secVIII.

¹⁸⁵ Hugo Grotius, *OLW&P*, *ibid*.

giving up caffeine). That being said, one could actively deceive another through one's behavior if one can predict how others will react to seeing the behavior presented to them (e.g. I want people to believe that I am not feeling well to gain their sympathy, so I make sure that people see me somberly sipping water instead of enjoying my coffee). That Grotius chooses to discuss the "real natures of the actions," and not the "accidental circumstances" of the actions seems to imply that he does not believe management to be morally blameworthy (i.e. lying) for the reason that one would be hard-pressed to blame a person for how another individual chose to interpret their behavior (especially if that interpretation runs contrary to the person's actual intentions). We can also see that the other reason why he does not believe management constitutes lying is that it "occasions no mischief," (i.e. deceiving through behavior is harmless). The examples he uses to illustrate management all seem to be fairly innocent as well (e.g. the Romans, when they were under siege and were starving, threw bread over their walls to make the enemy believe that they could last longer than they could).¹⁸⁶ One might suggest that it is problematic for Grotius to argue that deceiving others through one's behavior is harmless (or, if it is harmful, then it is not intentionally so), because there would seem to be many possible instances where one can manipulate one's behavior in order to intentionally fool someone else and cause them harm. In such a case, it would hardly be accidental for someone else to interpret my actions in a certain way, if I carry out those actions with the hope that they will interpret them in that way.

¹⁸⁶ Hugo Grotius, *OLW&P*, *ibid.*

There is one form of deception which Grotius actually believes to be a permissible lie. Whenever the obligation to be honest did not apply as was discussed before, Grotius did not consider it “lying” to deceive in such instances. He calls this “blameless mendacity,” and it only applies to cases in which, “one who has a right that is superior to all the rights of another makes use of this right either for his own or for the public good.”¹⁸⁷ When Grotius conceptualized such a figure with superior rights to others, he had in mind someone similar to one of Plato’s philosopher kings, because he claims that Plato was operating on the same principle when he gave the right to lie to his ideal rulers.¹⁸⁸ Grotius seems to follow the Platonic tradition by permitting authority figures to lie for the sake of the greater good, but he arguably departs from that tradition by claiming that it would be acceptable for an authority figure to lie for “his own” good (a philosopher king might have lied for his own *and* the public good, but never only for his own sake). In this way, Grotius’ work may have influenced his contemporary, Thomas Hobbes.

❖*Hobbes on Hypocrisy*❖

Hobbes produced his momentous piece, *Leviathan*, twenty-six years after *On the Law of War and Peace* was published. Hobbes was a known royalist who fled England during its civil war, and he knew that he would not be able to return to his home country unless he was able to ingratiate himself to the new power holders in parliament. To do so, Hobbes had to justify his seeming change in loyalties in a way that would avoid him being labeled a “hypocrite.” I would argue that Hobbes’

¹⁸⁷ Hugo Grotius, *OLW&P*, bk3.chap1.secXV.

¹⁸⁸ Hugo Grotius, *OLW&P*, *ibid*.

narrative on hypocrisy (which runs throughout his book) is, in fact, a narrative on lying and deception. Today, hypocrisy typically coincides with allegations of dishonest or deceitful behavior in politics, and the relationship between lying and hypocrisy is necessary to understand if one is to grasp the relevance of Hobbes in this genealogy. David Runciman gives a highly credible assessment of this relationship, and a thorough examination of hypocrisy, in his book, *Political Hypocrisy*. There, he traces the origins of hypocrisy back to the ancient Greeks, who referred to their stage actors as “hypocrites,” (*hypokrisis* was ancient Greek for “pretending” or “playing a part”).¹⁸⁹ In the theatrical realm, hypocrisy did not necessarily have a negative connotation, however actors had the ability to manipulate and mask the truth (like the ancient bards) by choosing which of their many faces to show (something that carries an implication of unreliability).¹⁹⁰ It is because hypocrisy involves the notion of a pretense that Runciman argues all hypocrisy could constitute a type of lie.¹⁹¹ However, he holds that not all lies are therefore hypocritical, because a lie could simply be the telling of an untruth, whereas hypocrisy necessitates “putting on an act, because an act involves the attempt to convey an impression that extends beyond the instant of the lie itself.”¹⁹² In short, hypocrisy means that whatever deception that is being practiced will be continued, possibly resulting in many more lies and mistaken beliefs. For Runciman, the vital characteristic of hypocrisy is not that it solely

¹⁸⁹ David Runciman, *Political Hypocrisy: The Mask of Power, From Hobbes to Orwell and Beyond*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2008) 7.

¹⁹⁰ David Runciman, *Political Hypocrisy*, 8.

¹⁹¹ David Runciman, *Political Hypocrisy*, 9.

¹⁹² David Runciman, *Political Hypocrisy*, *ibid.*

involves inconsistency between one's statements and actions (because people are apt to change their minds and vary their principles depending on different conditions), but rather it is that a hypocrite is one who is inconsistent despite a "prior commitment not to be inconsistent."¹⁹³ In this way, an actor today cannot be considered a hypocrite in the same way that a politician might qualify as one, because, at least in the theater, there is some assurance that one is watching fiction, while many (if not most) politicians are elected on the premise that they will uphold their office in an honest manner.

A presumption of honesty in others did not exist for Hobbes however, neither within nor outside of society. Hobbes argues that before man entered into society and the company of others for fear of death and the desire to attain the necessities for living, he lived in a "state of nature," which is essentially a state of constant war, where there is no law, no right or wrong, no justice or injustice, and only one right: the right of nature.¹⁹⁴ Hobbes describes the right of nature in a similar way to how Grotius discusses the natural right to life. He writes that the right of nature is "the liberty each man hath to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature... and consequently of doing anything which, in his own judgment and reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto."¹⁹⁵ To recapitulate then, when one is in a state of war against all, one has a right to all. Of course, men can try

¹⁹³ David Runciman, *Political Hypocrisy*, *ibid*.

¹⁹⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. 1994) Chapxiii.sec13.-Chapxiv.sec1.

¹⁹⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapxiv.sec1.

to make arrangements with others to pool their power and collectively try to maintain their survival, but (displaying a Machiavellian distrust for humanity) Hobbes argues, “the bonds of words are too weak to bridle men’s ambition... without the fear of some coercive power.”¹⁹⁶ Since Hobbes reasons that the two main motivating forces for humans are our fear of death and the desire to continue living, we can see that he believes these same forces can be used to bring people together to strive towards peace (which is the basis for Hobbes’ notion of “natural laws” which are capable of being discovered by reason¹⁹⁷). Therefore, in order to lift man out of the state of nature so that he can have lasting protection from others and so that he can live more peacefully, Hobbes proposed that people should band together and collectively transfer all of their power and their right of nature to one person or ruling assembly (the *Leviathan* or sovereign) who will exercise all the power bestowed on him to keep the population in terror, and “conform the wills of them all to peace at home and mutual aid against their enemies abroad.”¹⁹⁸ On the one hand, to transfer all of one’s power and one’s right of nature to the sovereign is to give up one’s right to rule one’s self and govern one’s own actions in exchange for complete loyalty to the one who now possesses these rights (one must regard the sovereign’s rulings and commands as though one was giving it to one’s self). The sovereign, on the other hand, is not only allowed to maintain his right of nature, but his ability to enforce it is exponentially strengthened by all of the power that has been placed at his disposal, and this is done

¹⁹⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapxiv.sec18.

¹⁹⁷ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapxiv.sec3.

¹⁹⁸ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapxvii.sec13.

in the hope that the sovereign will do everything and anything to keep his citizens from falling back into a state of nature. Thus, the mutually parasitic relationship that Machiavelli identifies between the state and its citizens (i.e. the reliance of the rulers on the people's support for power, and the reliance on the citizens on rulers for security so as to not fall back into an amoral state of nature) may also be found in Hobbes' work.

The fact that the sovereign can still lay claim to a right to all (when his people cannot) converts hypocrisy and lying into tightly controlled political privileges in the Hobbesian commonwealth. Hobbes argues that "whosoever has right to the end has right to the means," and since the sovereign is charged with the task of maintaining the peace, he may thereby do whatever he deems necessary to achieve it, which means that he has the powers to decide all controversies, and his word becomes law.¹⁹⁹ Since the sovereign is in complete control of the law, and he has been given his power through a legitimate transfer, Hobbes holds that all of the sovereign's rulings would be "just," (making anything contradictory to his decrees "unjust") and this includes the laws that only benefit him and not the citizens.²⁰⁰ The law itself does not apply to the sovereign, however, "for having power to make and repeal laws, he may, when he pleaseth, free himself from that subjection by repealing those laws that trouble him."²⁰¹ In this way, the sovereign will most likely pass into law requirements that he will not hold himself to, which is certainly an example of inconsistency, but

¹⁹⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapxviii.sec8-11.

²⁰⁰ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapxxx.sec20-21.

²⁰¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapxxvi.sec6.

does that mean that the sovereign is being hypocritical in doing this? Surprisingly, the answer would have to be “no.” Hobbes argues that, since the sovereign is given his powers through an agreement made by each citizen with the others (and not an agreement between the citizens and the sovereign himself), “there can happen no breach of covenant on the part of the sovereign.”²⁰² If the necessary condition of hypocrisy requires the violation of a prior agreement to refrain from inconsistency, then the sovereign cannot be said to be a hypocrite, because he at no point agrees to be consistent. Therefore, even if the sovereign requires that his citizens be honest, he does not have to follow such an imperative himself.

Hence, for a citizen of the Hobbesian commonwealth, the issue of whether deception is just or lawful is very much up to the sovereign. The state is in a position of almost complete power over the citizens. However, there are instances where Hobbes might have argued that deception would be permissible despite any state mandates outlawing it. He reasons that when people decide to transfer their rights to the sovereign, they can never give up their basic right to defend their lives, or any kind of right that is a derivative of the right to life such as the right to resist any assault, torture, or imprisonment.²⁰³ The consequence of retaining these basic rights makes it permissible to choose not to follow the sovereign under certain conditions. A citizen then can flee if the sovereign intends to hurt or detain him, and he can also refuse to hurt or kill others, or carry out a “dangerous or dishonorable” task, after

²⁰² Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapxviii.sec4.

²⁰³ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapxiv.sec8.

being commanded to do so by the sovereign.²⁰⁴ One could postulate that a citizen might even be permitted to lie to the sovereign in order to avoid dying, killing others, or dishonoring himself. It should be said, though, that even if it is permissible to disobey the sovereign for a legitimate reason, it would never be “just,” because, as was mentioned before, the sovereign is always the one who defines what is “just.”

❖ *A Nietzschean Perspective on Realist Notions of Lying in Politics and Society* ❖

It would be hard to doubt that political realism affected Nietzsche’s own philosophy, and views on the inner-workings of the state and society. It is possible that figures such as Machiavelli even influenced Nietzsche’s writing style. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche praises Machiavelli for “presenting the most serious matters in a boisterous *allegriissimo*,” or a “most capricious humor.”²⁰⁵ One might argue that Nietzsche fundamentally agreed with Machiavelli’s and Hobbes’ characterizations of human beings and their politics as ultimately driven by self-interest, and a desire for power. This becomes quite evident in how Nietzsche develops his concept of the will to power, describing it as the deep drive behind all of our desires (ranging from “good” to “evil”) that manifests itself in our pursuit of morality, truth, and even self-preservation.²⁰⁶ Nietzsche even seemed to agree with the Machiavellian notion of politics as the maintenance of power for the longest duration possible, since he believed that culture could not develop without a stable power structure. He argues that, “only when there is securely founded and guaranteed

²⁰⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapxxi.sec12-15.

²⁰⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 41.

²⁰⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 31.

long duration [of government] is a steady evolution and ennobling inoculation at all possible: though the dangerous companion of all duration, established authority, will, to be sure, usually resist it.”²⁰⁷

To better understand what Nietzsche’s concerns are with politics we might consider his attitude towards another realist. Interestingly, while Nietzsche respected Machiavelli, he seemed to despise Hobbes. Nietzsche counted Hobbes among the English philosophers he hated (also including Bacon, Hume, and Locke), and he argued that Hobbes depreciated philosophy in his attempt to render a view of the world and life that was as mechanistic and serious as possible.²⁰⁸ Nietzsche hated that Hobbes rejected laughter for example, because Nietzsche saw laughter as a natural activity that frees humanity from, or allows him to transcend, the seriousness of life.²⁰⁹ The same seriousness that Nietzsche wished to free mankind from occasionally, he claimed, may also be found in the state. He writes, “the state is a hypocritical hound... it likes to talk with smoke and bellowing-- to make himself believe... that he is talking out of the belly of reality. For he wants to be by all means the most important beast on Earth, the state; and they believe him too.” Perhaps a ruler who ran the state in a “boisterous *allegriissimo*” (i.e. in the manner Machiavelli would have run the state) would be satisfactorily light-hearted for Nietzsche, but he arguably would have seen a serious sovereign to be a threat. This is not to say that Nietzsche could not respect a ruler who took his position seriously, because Nietzsche

²⁰⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 108.

²⁰⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 189.

²⁰⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 231-232.

did idolize Napoleon and his ability to command the masses,²¹⁰ but there is room to argue that Napoleon did not run his state as a Hobbesian sovereign might have. That Hobbes would allow for a sovereign to be legitimately capricious (i.e. the sovereign can always change his mind and it will be lawful) would most likely have been unforgivable in Nietzsche's mind, and would not have aligned with his ideal of Napoleon (someone who brought security and stability to France when he was in power). He believed (as we have already seen) that stability is necessary for the ongoing, collectively-creative activity of establishing culture, and allowing it to flourish. If a ruler's whims were to endanger this stability, it would be problematic to argue that such circumstances would allow for the service of life in a Nietzschean, or political sense. Perhaps, for Nietzsche, it would be one thing for a state to lie to its people to maintain peace and order, but it would be something entirely different for a state to lie with the intention of destabilizing its society in order to serve the purposes of individual politicians (e.g. occurrences such as the red-scare in the 50's might come to mind). Nietzsche might have supported the existence of a ruler with Hobbesian-style sovereign powers as long as an übermensch was in that position, since he believed that the vast majority of people (whom he referred to as the "herd") needed to have a strong commander telling them what to do and think, despite personally idealizing those who are obedient and meek.²¹¹

As for the regulation of lying according to a system of rights such as the one Grotius suggested, Nietzsche recognized that rights, first and foremost, had their

²¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 111.

²¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *ibid.*

origin in human convention.²¹² Eventually, man forgot that such rights existed merely because they were created, and came to believe that they existed as part of a “sacred, immutable state of affairs,” that people were compelled to follow despite running into instances where the tradition “no longer served the purpose for which the agreement had originally been concluded.”²¹³ If this is so, it would be problematic to argue that a system of rights ought to serve as anything more than a guideline for human beings in their moral decisions, since the simple possession of a right to lie in a particular case may involve harming countless other lives, or one’s own. The opposite case is just as threatening: where a person might not have the right to lie, but not doing so may irrevocably harm the lives of many people. One might suggest, however, that Nietzsche would not have completely done away with the notion of rights, since it is likely he understood that rights allow society to have structure and stability, and he also believed in the importance of culture and tradition for the purpose of serving life. Ultimately, rights to vote, speech, abstain from speech, elect and impeach officials, bring cases to court, write and publish opinions, as well as to assemble and discuss issues may all support the stability of political institutions in the face of the threat of destabilization caused by certain lies.

❖*The Progression*❖

We have seen how lying was *prima facie* purged from the ethical and political realm of thought by the rise of Judeo-Christianity; however, deception remained a persistent feature of political activities among citizens and rulers, and clergymen

²¹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human*, 319.

²¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human*, 319-320.

alike. It could be argued that, once that fact was acknowledged, the hypocrisy of the absolutists in the religious sphere in their personal and political dealings allowed lying to return to the place of prominence in life it once had for the Greeks, and then to surpass that place by acquiring an unprecedented degree of justification from theorists such as Machiavelli and Hobbes. One might say that Machiavelli separated the spheres of the political, ethical, and religious from each other, while Hobbes brought the ethical and the religious under the command of the political realm (since the *Leviathan* also had the right to legislate over how citizens ought to worship and conduct their affairs). Clearly, the moral ambiguity surrounding the subjects of lies and deceit had returned from its long hiatus, and it was arguably more convoluted than ever before. For those political and moral philosophers who would later inherit this ambiguity, there would remain a constant impulse to continue to shed light on, and make sense of, lying. One way to articulate what was on the horizon is that a great effort would be made to find out the “truth” about lies (namely, the “truth” about what ought to factor into our ethical and political judgments concerning lies on an individual, personal basis), and there was never a more fitting time for this pursuit of “truth” than the Enlightenment.

Chapter 4: Lying in The Enlightenment

As well as being a time of rising secularism, the Enlightenment bore witness to an increase in efforts to garner a new appreciation for the nature of truth, and whether human beings, as citizens and politicians, can know the truth at all. After Descartes questioned the nature of reality by proposing the possibility that an evil demon may be controlling our perception in order to deceive us, other theorists began to examine the relationship between deception and the mind. Specifically, philosophers were curious about the role that human faculties might play in judging when, or whether, deception could be acceptable. This raises the question, however, of whether our faculties can be used as a reliable moral gauge in ethical or political matters. I will argue that there was an initial preference among Enlightenment philosophers that favored the use of our intuitive cognitive powers (e.g. affections, empathy, and conscience); however, by the end of the Enlightenment, reason was made the standard by which deception and lying were to be judged. David Hume, in trying to come to a technical understanding of the mind's faculties, may have arguably revealed that deception was built into our cognition for practical purposes (i.e. in order to make a coherent experience of the world possible). He also argued that ethical permissibility relied on an intuitive emotional response to a perceived wrong, instead of any intrinsic quality of an action, or the conformity of an action to a prescribed rule. This emphasis on the emotional content of moral judgment was arguably continued by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who advocated the use of conscience to decide when deceit ought to be used in certain cases. He also believed that one

could still be honest despite intentionally conveying falsehoods to others. Finally, by making all ethical conduct reliant on the agent's subservience to his faculty of reason, Immanuel Kant attempted to propose a rational, normative law (the categorical imperative) that could universally define the moral status of deception. Kant's moral framework would seem to signal a return to the moral absolutism of the early Christians, since he expressly rejected all forms of lying; yet, one might argue that certain types of intentionally deceptive behavior are permissible according to his theory.

❖*Deception and Cognition*❖

To provide an answer to the question of whether human beings can know the truth in general, David Hume (1711-1776) began by examining the specific faculties of the mind. In his piece, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume endeavors to create a "mental geography," that itemizes and orders the faculties so that one could better understand their functions.²¹⁴ Hume also wanted to investigate the content of the mind (which the faculties operate on) in the hopes of assessing whether one could attach the names of "truth," or "knowledge" to any of this content. He calls the content of the mind "perceptions," and he characterizes them into two types: 1) impressions, which are the sensations and reactions we immediately perceive when we experience an external stimulus, and 2) thoughts, or ideas, which are essentially copies of impressions we once had.²¹⁵ These perceptions are filtered

²¹⁴ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Eric Steinburg (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. 1993) 7.

²¹⁵ David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 10.

through our faculties and are related to other perceptions via comparisons such that we can posit certain “facts” about the world we experience. These “facts” (or truth-claims), according to Hume, all rely on the concept of cause and effect,²¹⁶ but Hume arguably reveals in his work that this concept is the product of an elaborate act of self-deception.

Hume came to the conclusion that our knowledge of cause and effect comes to us *a posteriori* by witnessing the succession of events and noticing that certain events are “constantly conjoined” with each other (something Hume calls “constant connexion”).²¹⁷ Upon witnessing one event occurring after another for the first time (e.g. imagine a baby seeing a billiard ball hit another billiard ball, and then seeing the second ball roll away from the first), Hume argues that we do not immediately know or believe that the prior event causes the other, since there is nothing about the qualities of the prior event, or the latter event, that dictates a causal connection.²¹⁸ Rather, it is only after we witness such events following each other in a similar manner numerous times that we become habituated to believe that the latter event will always follow the prior event.²¹⁹ This habituation eventually leads us to the conclusion that one event will always follow the other, and that no other event could possibly follow the prior event.²²⁰ Hume identifies that we move from thinking that

²¹⁶ David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 16.

²¹⁷ David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 17.

²¹⁸ David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, *ibid.*

²¹⁹ David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 28.

²²⁰ David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 18

an event *has* always followed another event, to thinking that the same event *will* always follow the prior event, and it is this leap in judgment that Hume wishes to draw his readers' attention to.²²¹

Hume argues that this leap is of crucial importance, since it is the basis upon which we form a notion of cause and effect, as well as the foundation of every fact or truth-claim we might assert.²²² It is an unjustified conclusion that our minds naturally arrive at. Due to this, Hume claims that reason has no part in the development of our sense of cause and effect; rather, it is the result of an instinctual mechanism of the mind.²²³ That we instinctually come to believe that one event causes another is not necessarily an act of self-deception by itself. After recognizing that our concept of causation is ill-founded, however, it becomes a clear case in which we know that one of our beliefs has been destabilized, yet still maintain that we are secure in that belief for lack of a desire to question such a fundamental "fact" we rely on in everyday life. One might suggest that it is our further usage of the concept of causation that leads us to deceive ourselves about a great number of things though. After we develop the notion of cause and effect, we begin to compare all new perceptions to that concept in order to find similarities we can use to make our perceptions into a coherent experience of the world.²²⁴ This readiness to compare future experiences to past experiences under the assumption that one can serve as an accurate prediction for the

²²¹ David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 22.

²²² David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 30.

²²³ David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 37.

²²⁴ David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 18.

other is problematic for at least two reasons. Firstly, there is a certain amount of arbitrariness in how we come to believe that one succession of events actually resembles another succession we experienced in the past. Secondly, Hume himself notes that we are lead to believe that every event has a cause, and where no event is witnessed prior to an event we do witness, or where several events occur in tandem before another event, we will arbitrarily posit an event to be the cause of another.²²⁵ Essentially, our instincts are wired to make us come to conclusions that are *post hoc ergo propter hoc* in our attempts to make sense of our experiences.

Despite the deception that is programmed into our cognition, Hume never questioned the use of cause and effect. He understood that it was necessary to have a notion of causality not only to make sense of our experience, but also to allow for humans to learn from experience and shape their actions accordingly. He writes that, without cause and effect, “We should never know how to adjust means to ends, or to employ our natural powers in the production of any effect. There would be an end at once of all action, as well as the chief part of speculation.”²²⁶ Of course, an end to all action would also mean an end to all moral action as well. He argues that the habituation we experience in order to produce our concept of causality is, “necessary to the subsistence of our species, and the regulation of our conduct,” in that we rely on it to affect our world, but to also pursue good ends, while avoiding evil ones.²²⁷ Clearly, then, Hume thought that without our mind’s slight of hand in producing

²²⁵ David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, *ibid.*

²²⁶ David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 29.

²²⁷ David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 36.

cause and effect out of the multitude of perceptions we take in, morality and ethical conduct would be beyond our grasp. In this sense, one might say that morality, and life more generally, relies on deception.

❖ *Hume on the Source of Morality* ❖

Similar to his discussion of causality, Hume believed that morality had nothing to do with reason either. Morality, for Hume, is something that influences human actions via our affections (the combination of our emotions and desires) such that a person would be compelled to action.²²⁸ Morality, in this way, may be considered an active force. Reason, however, is characterized by Hume as being a filter for our perceptions, which is meant to discover any truth or falsehood in our experience.²²⁹ For a perception to be “true” or “false,” it has to corroborate (or, at least, not contradict) established matters of fact known from past experiences.²³⁰ Hence, reason may be seen as a passive faculty in the human mind in that it only receives and interprets; it does not affect our other faculties or thoughts. It is because of this that Hume claims, “tis in vain to pretend that morality is discover’d only by a deduction of reason. An active principle can never be founded on an inactive.”²³¹ Therefore, morality requires a judgment of our moral senses, which Hume argues can be found deeply rooted in every person whose mind has not been completely

²²⁸ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford UP. 2000) bk3, part1.294.

²²⁹ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, bk3.part1.295.

²³⁰ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, *ibid*.

²³¹ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, bk3.part1.294.

compromised by “disease or madness.”²³² There seems to be an assumption that is implicit in Hume’s argument that people’s moral senses operate similarly in every person, and they gauge the morality of an action in a similar fashion as well. This becomes more evident when he writes, “virtue is distinguish’d by the pleasure, and vice by the pain, that any action, sentiment or character gives us by the mere view and contemplation.”²³³ In this way, one might suppose that Hume would have thought the moral quality of a lie or act of deception would have hinged on the amount of pain or pleasure it produced (not unlike the Utilitarians), as well as how it could affect people’s sentiments (i.e. whether it would inspire feelings of moral disapproval). Hence, one might consider Hume to be a consequentialist.

Further insight into Hume’s thoughts on deception may be found in his discussion of obligations and promises in his *Treatise of Human Nature*. There, he argues that there is no faculty of the mind that presides over whether we maintain our word, and that there is no natural compulsion for human beings to avoid breaking their promises outside of the artificial conventions produced by society.²³⁴ Like Hobbes, Hume believed that an obligation to honest behavior only stemmed from a social contract, where (in order to gain security) individuals “enter into a scheme of actions, calculated for common benefit, and agree to be true to their word.”²³⁵ He also suggests that the reason a lie might upset our moral sensitivity is that, after such an

²³² David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, bk3.part1.305.

²³³ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, *ibid*.

²³⁴ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, bk3.sec.2.333.

²³⁵ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, bk3.part2.335.

agreement was made by society members, people's moral sentiments concurred with their interests (e.g. survival) becoming "a new obligation upon mankind."²³⁶ Hence, the obligation to maintain one's word, or to speak honestly, is human-made for the purpose of serving the public good. This is not to say that the value of honesty possesses no moral worth however. One might suggest that Hume understood the importance of honesty, since he recognized that it was crucial for the maintenance of society. However, it is possible that he was trying to emphasize mankind's ability to produce new values.

❖ *Particular Truths and The Use of Conscience* ❖

Jean-Jacques Rousseau also pursued his ethical beliefs in relation to his investigation into what "truth" really is for human beings. In fact, his motto was "*vitam impendere vero*," or "to devote one's life to the truth."²³⁷ This is a rather curious facet of Rousseau's life, since he readily admitted to the number of falsehoods he told, both good and bad. There is a well-known episode from his childhood that he discusses with great shame in his *Confessions* and in his *Reveries* in which he stole a ribbon and then implicated a servant girl in its theft. He also writes that, "on going over my life more carefully, I was surprised by the number of things of my own invention which I remembered presenting as true at the very time."²³⁸ Despite recognizing this tendency to manipulate the truth in his past, Rousseau claims that he

²³⁶ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, *ibid.*

²³⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, trans. Peter France (London: Penguin Books Ltd. 2004), 63.

²³⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries*, 64.

continued to utilize falsehoods and stories instead of facts in ordinary conversation, when “interesting truths do not spring to mind readily enough.”²³⁹ While Rousseau’s devotion to truth may seem to be inconsistent with his social practices, it might be more correct to argue that he had instead re-conceptualized what it meant to be truthful, or honest.

Rousseau gives an in-depth discussion of what being an “honest” man meant to him in his *Reveries*. However, to understand his notion of honesty, one must first understand a crucial distinction between certain types of truth that Rousseau proposes. For Rousseau, there was truth in a “general” sense and truth in a “particular” sense. General truth is a highly normative ideal, about which Rousseau writes, “Through it man learns to conduct himself, to live and act as he ought, and to strive towards his true end.”²⁴⁰ In the category of general truth, we would find moral truths that we owe to every individual, since they are necessary for our happiness and well-being (i.e. they serve human life).²⁴¹ Such truths are useful to the highest degree, because they pertain to justice.²⁴² Particular truths, however, are not necessarily useful, or are of indifferent value, and may sometimes be considered bad or harmful.²⁴³ A useless truth, according to Rousseau, cannot be owed to anyone, since that would require it to be the rightful property of the person it is owed to, and

²³⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries*, 72.

²⁴⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries*, 66.

²⁴¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries*, *ibid.*

²⁴² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries*, *ibid.*

²⁴³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries*, *ibid.*

property relies on whether a thing is useful.²⁴⁴ Hence, manipulating a useless truth would leave the recipient in no worse a state than if the person did not know the truth of the matter at all (Rousseau makes the comparison between believing mistakenly that the sand on the bottom of the ocean is red, and not having any belief about the color of that sand).²⁴⁵ Essentially, Rousseau's guiding principle in his argument concerning useless truths is that one does no harm where one harms no one (injustice being defined by whether harm is perpetrated against another²⁴⁶). From this, we might also extrapolate that a truth that does cause harm to others might be among the "bad" truths that Rousseau mentions earlier. Since a harmful truth may also be said to be useless to its possessor (i.e. harming is typically considered the opposite of helping), it too cannot be owed to anyone. Hence, Rousseau argues that concealing or manipulating a useless, or bad, truth cannot be considered "lying" (implying that lies only involve an affront to the general, or moral, truth).²⁴⁷

It follows that Rousseau's "honest man" is one who would never attempt to manipulate the general truth, but would find it permissible to be looser with useless particular truths.²⁴⁸ However, this raises the problematic matter of when, and how, one can know if a truth, or untruth, would be important, or useful. Rousseau states that untruths which are told in one's own interest, or that lead to unfair judgments in

²⁴⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries*, *ibid.*

²⁴⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries*, 67.

²⁴⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries*, *ibid.*

²⁴⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries*, 66.

²⁴⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries*, 71-72.

the minds of others are unjust, would thus be considered lying.²⁴⁹ Yet, these statements are not sufficiently clear enough to help one assess when a person must be told the truth. Surely, a fact may seem useless at one point that might become useful later, or a fact might be useless to one person, but useful to another. Rousseau recognizes this difficulty himself when he asks, “if the obligation to speak the truth is founded solely on usefulness, how can I set myself up as a judge of this usefulness? Very often one person’s gain is another’s loss, and private interest is almost always in conflict with the public good.”²⁵⁰ The solution that Rousseau offers is to use one’s conscience to decide, rather than one’s reason.²⁵¹ Similar to Hume, ethical decisions for Rousseau had to be felt sentimentally, rather than calculated rationally. This is evidenced where he writes that the honest man’s love for the truth (and arguably his corresponding ability to always tell the truth in matters of justice), “is simply an emanation of the love of justice.”²⁵² For Rousseau, the conscience (via a connection to the ideal of justice that is constituted by love) possesses ethical knowledge prior to one’s reason, which can guide our actions.²⁵³ Even the assessment of the ethical status of other people’s actions has to be grounded in what they were feeling at the time, or their intentions (the only thing Rousseau claims we can use to assess the moral worth of an action).²⁵⁴

²⁴⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries*, *ibid.*

²⁵⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries*, 67.

²⁵¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries*, 68.

²⁵² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries*, 72.

²⁵³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries*, 73.

²⁵⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries*, 68-69.

One might challenge Rousseau in the same way that Hume was challenged earlier: on the grounds that consciences work differently from person to person. For Rousseau to advocate that everyone ought to abide merely by their consciences seems to suggest that he believed that consciences functioned more or less uniformly between individuals. Presumably, if one intended to harm another person (Rousseau's definition of injustice), one would have to act against the voice of their conscience, rendering one's intentions "evil." Yet, a situation might arise in which a person could not live with himself unless he harmed another. Some people's consciences tell them to seek revenge, whereas others command people to turn the other cheek, and both types of consciences may be equally motivated by a love of justice (although Rousseau would most likely reject this). Rousseau would arguably claim that if one desires to harm another, one is mistakenly in love with injustice rather than justice; hence, one only ought to let their conscience decide in ethical matters if it possesses a "true" love of justice.

Just as Plato had done, Rousseau made "truth" and "justice" equal,²⁵⁵ which may prompt one to ask whether he thought that justice could ever be served by an untruth. Again, Rousseau chose to deal with this issue in a similar way to that of Plato. The untruths that Rousseau was wont to relay to others in his everyday conversations were not merely for the amusement of himself or others. Rousseau believed that he was substituting moral truth for factual truth by attempting "to give a true picture of the natural affections of the human heart, and to draw some useful

²⁵⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries*, 72.

lesson from my stories, making them like moral tales.”²⁵⁶ In a sense, by making an untruth “useful” (by making it serve justice), Rousseau could turn it into a general truth. He did not consider this type of falsehood to be a lie; rather it was a “fiction” that aimed to present useful truths to others in an aesthetic manner (not unlike the ones told by the ancient Greek bards).²⁵⁷ Rousseau applied this idea of how untruth could serve the moral truth to his political philosophy. The law-giver, who is to help establish Rousseau’s ideal state by drafting the original laws of the state’s constitution so that they reflect the general will (or greater good), must make the more “vulgar” citizens accept his laws.²⁵⁸ However, this leaves the law-giver “incapable of appealing either to force or reason,” and he must “have recourse to an authority of another order, which can lead without compelling and persuade without convincing.”²⁵⁹ The law-giver would have to claim that the laws of the constitution were received via divine intervention, directly from “the mouth of the immortals.”²⁶⁰ Rousseau understood the role that religion could play in lending legitimacy to an untruth, in much the same manner that Plato did when he argued that his noble lie would have to be supported by a divine prophecy. Rousseau’s law-giver would harness a useful falsehood, not unlike a philosopher king. The law-giver would not be a “liar,” however, since that name would be reserved only for those who use falsehoods for the

²⁵⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries*, 74.

²⁵⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries*, 69.

²⁵⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “On the Social Contract” in *Rousseau’s Political Writings*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 1988). 109.

²⁵⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “On the Social Contract” *ibid.*

²⁶⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “On the Social Contract,” 110.

sake of injustice. In this way, the government's relationship to its citizens is that of an enforcer of the greater good, and the government is meant to bring the people around to the greater good (at least initially) via deception.

Since the lie concerning the origin of the laws of the state is told to the citizens without the intention of appealing to their reason, one might wonder what faculty it is meant for. It is also here that we might begin to see a contradiction in Rousseau's argument. On the one hand, he wanted people to follow their hearts and their consciences, since these things have a stronger, more intuitive, connection to justice. Yet, one might suggest that these are the same things Rousseau would have us manipulate in order to produce his ideal state. Hence, our hearts or consciences might have a grasp of ethical truths, yet they are also capable of being deceived. We might wrongfully (yet with the best of intentions) put faith into something that is false, and this begs the question of whether we can be deceived about what is "truly right" in an ethical or political sense. Religious cults and oppressive regimes have encouraged mass suicides and killings, by relying on the devout faith of their followers. What we put our faith in, and how we feel about certain things, are arguably conditional upon what we have been exposed to (along with many other conditional aspects of life), and it is perhaps this realization that would prompt a later theorist to search for a moral law that could command unconditionally.

❖ *Nietzsche's Reaction to Hume and Rousseau* ❖

It is interesting to note that, despite there being so much common ground among the theories of Hume, Rousseau and Nietzsche, Nietzsche displayed a largely

negative reaction to these thinkers. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Nietzsche counted Hume among a set of English philosophers whom he held in contempt for trying to create an overly systematic and serious view of the world and politics. However, it would seem that Nietzsche agreed quite strongly with Hume's conclusion that our notion of causality is the product of the human capacity to create fictions that allow us to better live in this world. Nietzsche writes, "it is *we* alone who have devised cause, sequence, for-each-other, relativity, constraint, number, law, freedom, motive, and purpose; and when we project and mix this symbol world into things as if it existed "in itself," we act... mythologically."²⁶¹ He also agreed with Hume on the point that lying, today, is only seen as a wrong due to societal convention, and that the rules of society (by themselves) are not a sufficient guide or motivator for our ethical conduct (i.e. we need something more, such as a sentiment, or passion to motivate action). Similarly, Nietzsche seemed to agree with Rousseau on the imperative of valuing one's conscience, albeit for different reasons. For Rousseau, the conscience is a kind of guide; it can be applied in a forwardly orientated manner so as to lead one to act in a moral way. Nietzsche argued that the conscience is, among other things, a fail-safe for our ethical pursuits when their consequences go awry (i.e. if one acted in good conscience, it will provide an excuse to alleviate the pain of failure, or negative, unintended results).²⁶² He also believed that maintaining a good conscience is a necessity if one wants to avoid a "sickly and wretched" life, unhindered by internal

²⁶¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 29.

²⁶² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 225.

pain.²⁶³ However, Nietzsche ultimately thought of Rousseau as an effeminate idealist, ultimately motivated by Christian values. In his book, *Nietzsche Contra Rousseau*, Keith Ansell-Pearson describes Nietzsche's opinion of Rousseau: that Rousseau was a "social revolutionary whose attitude of *ressentiment* towards life finds expression in a political ideology of radical egalitarianism, a secular successor to the Christian teaching of the equality of all souls before God, and an ethics of the herd."²⁶⁴ Rousseau idealized pre-societal man to a degree, arguing that there was no inequality in the state of nature (apart from natural differences in people's abilities), and that inequality only developed along with societal conventions, which (if man ever wanted to reacquire his goodness) necessitated the creation of a society that valued relationships and interactions based on equality and liberty.²⁶⁵ Pearson argues that Nietzsche agreed with Rousseau concerning the corruption of man by society; however, Nietzsche thought that man had not been corrupted enough, because corruption and decadence, for him, represented a natural part of the evolution of culture (i.e. as social values would begin to decay, conventional constraints on "bold" and "free" spirits would be lessened such that they could pursue great actions.)²⁶⁶

Aside from Nietzsche's disputes with these philosophers, it seems that he took to heart the idea that moral and political actions need to take into account certain aspects of an individual's humanity that are natural and irrational: the passions.

²⁶³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 224.

²⁶⁴ Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche Contra Rousseau*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 1996) 49.

²⁶⁵ Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche Contra Rousseau*, 74.

²⁶⁶ Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche Contra Rousseau*, 47.

Nietzsche saw a rejection of the natural world (both the external natural world and the internal, personal, world) in the prevalent modes of ethical thought in his day (namely, Judeo-Christian, and rationalist perspectives), and he revered the ancient Greeks for turning “their ideal impulse precisely towards the passions and loved, elevated, gilded, and deified them; evidently passion made them feel not only happier but also purer and more divine than usual.”²⁶⁷ He argued that acting from our passions made our moral actions more graceful, beautiful, and meaningful; elevating the status of our actions beyond the more trivial tasks we perform dispassionately.²⁶⁸ Ultimately, deciding how one might act, or which normative goal one might strive for (e.g. the health of the soul), for Nietzsche, would necessarily involve a judgment based on the things we are compelled towards or away from by our passions and emotional attachments, and Nietzsche used this premise to articulate why there are so many versions of certain normative concepts (i.e. the passions are aroused differently from person to person, and this leads to a multitude of different variations of concepts such as the health of the soul).²⁶⁹ He thought it was better to accept the role our passions play in directing our actions (as a motivational force for decision-making and acting), and to work constructively with them to allow them to be exercised, thus ensuring they will not be suppressed and then later be expressed as “devastating torrents.”²⁷⁰ One might say that Nietzsche understood that our passions are a part of

²⁶⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 126.

²⁶⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 103.

²⁶⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 116.

²⁷⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 319

life, and the affirmation of life requires us to accept this aspect of life, rather than reject it in hopes that it will disappear. Therefore, our passions (mediated by a concern for our consciences) may be an acceptable resource to turn to in order to inform our use of deception and lying within society and politics. In fact, one might go even further by suggesting that politicians and citizens alike are already motivated by their passions at some point in their judgments, with the passions being mediated by their reason to greater and lesser extents. This view of individual decision-making is not easily reconciled with the values that modern liberal democracies rely on and disseminate (e.g. impartiality, the ability to be persuaded by reason, etc.); however, this is a viewpoint that allows us access to different kinds of insights when we judge the political and ethical statuses of others' actions. If we blame politicians for acting more out of personal feeling than out of pure rationality (a notion that this view of decision-making calls into question) when they lie, we might be better enabled to turn our focus inward and examine just what it is that drives us to lie at times. We might find that we cannot attribute as much blame to politicians or fellow citizens when we find commonalities in our motivations for lying (e.g. when individuals lie out of love, or a concern for others' well-being). Ultimately, this perspective might help citizens and politicians to avoid focusing on issues of blame, especially when there might be other lies being told that are far more blameworthy (e.g. lies that are predicated on undesirable or petty motivations such as greed, hatred, or sheer prejudice).

However, one must acknowledge that we ought not to act on every passion we have, since our passions can compel us to harm others, as well as destabilize society,

thus making culture and the creative process of establishing new values, or maintaining old values, impossible. Two questions may arise from this realization: 1) “To what degree should our faculty of reason modulate our passions and desires?” and 2) “Which passions are worthy of motivating political and social action?” I would argue that, despite the amount of reason we use in our judgments being incalculable, (in the case of telling lies) reason must arbitrate which passions we act on to the extent that we at least consider the ramifications of telling the truth instead of immediately turning to deception. It is very easy to let momentary desires and emotional attachments drive us to lie without any forethought, but these lies possess the potential to create dangerous consequences. Such thoughtless lies might also put one in a situation in which more lies are necessary to tell in order to maintain the security and well-being of others. Considering honesty as a first option can help one to avoid unnecessarily complicated, or morally intolerable, circumstances, and reason can arguably play a crucial role in the process of our deliberations.

As to the second question, Nietzsche understood quite well the need to distinguish between certain passions, and emotions, that are conducive to life, and passions that may ultimately work against it. He argues that a more active moral perspective (in contrast to a more reactive stance) that does not rely on hatred, or is constrained by *ressentiment* (a kind of hateful envy towards those who fall outside of the group or community one is a member of) is a freer and more life-affirming goal.²⁷¹ Nietzsche acknowledges that both the reactive passions and active passions

²⁷¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, *ibid.*

may aid in the creation of morals (since it was supposedly out of *ressentiment* that the slave revolt in morality grew); however, a moral system that relies on an “other” to be creative is essentially one that relies on “a hostile external world,” and the existence, or lack, of such a world would always constrain their attempts to create.²⁷² To relate this to deception, one might suggest that not everyone will agree that specific lies made for passionate reasons are appropriate to tell; however, those who do tell such lies would at least be able to feel some personal justification for their behavior on an individual basis. Furthermore, if we were to lie based on active passions (passions not grounded in hate, fear, or envy of others) there might exist a possibility for establishing a consensus between individuals that is stronger and farther-reaching than an agreement motivated by antagonism. This would allow us to enter into valuable dialogues in politics and society about which types of lies may better affirm life by ensuring that it stays meaningful, and worthy of still living.

❖*The Supremacy of Reason*❖

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) understood the subjectivity of human sensitivity. He knew that certain things could affect the emotions and inclinations of one person, while failing to do so in another (something embodied in his distinction between subjective goods and practical goods).²⁷³ Even in one individual, an emotional movement towards a certain objective could easily change along with the tide of one’s feelings. That is why Kant argues in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of*

²⁷² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, 36-37.

²⁷³ Immanuel Kant, “Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,” in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. by Mary J. Gregor, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008) 4:413.

Morals that, if one were to take intuitive feelings as one's moral guide, the result would be a "mixed doctrine of morals," that would, "make the mind waver between motives that cannot be brought under any principle, that can lead only contingently to what is good and can very often also lead to what is evil."²⁷⁴ Only reason, for Kant, operates uniformly between individuals, and it is due to this that reason alone has the force to produce a moral law that a good will (a will that acts from duty) can utilize in ethical judgments.²⁷⁵ The duty from which a good will (the only thing which has any value in and of itself for Kant) acts is one that obliges the agent to fulfill it irrespective of any other goods he might desire (subjective goods).²⁷⁶ Hence, duty relies on imperatives that command unconditionally, and Kant argues that this is the categorical imperative, as opposed to a hypothetical imperative (e.g. the categorical imperative would command one to "do X," while a hypothetical imperative would suggest "if you want Y, then you must do X").²⁷⁷ For a rule to hold unconditionally, it stands to reason that it must be binding regardless of when, where, or who it applies to. In this way, it must be applicable universally. Kant created one imperative based on these premises, and it was: "act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law."²⁷⁸ This is the universal

²⁷⁴ Immanuel Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," 4:411.

²⁷⁵ Immanuel Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," 4:414.

²⁷⁶ Immanuel Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," 4:408.

²⁷⁷ Immanuel Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," 4:414.

²⁷⁸ Immanuel Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," 4:421.

formulation of the categorical imperative, but Kant also proposed others (for the purposes of this piece, we will only examine two of his formulations).

The formulation of humanity is another way that Kant articulates the categorical imperative, which is that all human beings and rational agents must never be treated merely as a means to an end, but also as an end in themselves.²⁷⁹ It should be noted that one can still treat another person as a means to an end; otherwise it would be unethical to hire a plumber or deal with anyone in the service industry. That is why Kant articulates his formulation of humanity in such a way as to allow treating people as a means to an end, so long as they are also being treated as an end in themselves. Also, to treat a person as an end in himself, for Kant, means that the person must be treated as having unconditional worth. The source of this worth comes from one's faculty of reason; because it is the source of all value (i.e. only rational agents have the ability to bestow value and worth on other things).²⁸⁰ Hence, treating a person as an end in himself also means treating the individual as a rational agent, and Kant advocates that we treat every human being as such.²⁸¹

While both the universal formulation and the formulation of humanity are commands, they might also be seen as ethical tests of proposed courses of action, or one's "maxims." A maxim is a statement of one's intended actions in the form of a general principle. An example that Kant uses to show how one could apply a maxim to the categorical imperative involves the hypothetical situation in which an

²⁷⁹ Immanuel Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," 4:429.

²⁸⁰ Immanuel Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," 4:428.

²⁸¹ Immanuel Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," *ibid.*

individual intends to use deception (by telling a lying-promise) to obtain money to extricate himself from a difficult situation.²⁸² The method this individual would use would be as follows: 1) he would first formulate his maxim (e.g. “when I need money, I shall borrow money and promise to repay it, even though I will never repay the debt”), 2) he would then try to imagine what the world would be like if this maxim were practiced as a universal law (meaning if everyone, everywhere, practiced this maxim), 3) finally, he would consider whether the rule would run into any practical, moral, or other forms of contradiction, and then decide whether to act on that maxim accordingly.²⁸³ In the case of a man telling a lying promise, Kant argues that such a person would find a contradiction in his maxim, since if it were made a universal law, everyone would know that everyone will promise things without the intention of making good on those promises, and the notion of “promises” (in general) would cease to exist.²⁸⁴ Kant also argues that this maxim would fail the test of the formulation of humanity, in that one would quickly see that the individual being lied to in order to obtain the money is being used, and is not being treated as an end in himself (i.e. the maxim is not one that the person being lied to would willingly consent to as a rational agent).²⁸⁵

The example of the lying promise does not forbid all forms of deception by itself, but there is evidence to support the conclusion that Kant believed no form of

²⁸² Immanuel Kant, “Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,” 4:422.

²⁸³ Immanuel Kant, “Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,” *ibid.*

²⁸⁴ Immanuel Kant, “Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,” *ibid.*

²⁸⁵ Immanuel Kant, “Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,” 4:429

lying could be justified according to his formulations of the categorical imperative. In a reply to Benjamin Constant entitled *On A Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy*, Kant claims that “truthfulness in statements that one cannot avoid is a human being’s duty to everyone, however great the disadvantage to him or to another may result from it,” on the grounds that it does away with the notions of agreements, contracts, and rights which humanity universally depends upon.²⁸⁶ Aside from Kant’s universalist manner of argument there, he also provides another reason why lying (even if it is considered a philanthropic lie, or a lie for the sake of the good) cannot be allowed. He also argues that if one tells a lie, one is also made morally responsible for the events that follow that action.²⁸⁷ In the infamous example that Kant deals with where a murderer arrives at your door looking to kill a friend you have allowed to hide inside, Kant suggests that if one were to lie to the murderer (by telling him that your friend is no longer in your home), and your friend were to escape out the back only to come face to face with the murderer (who would then proceed to kill him), it is you that would bear the responsibility for his death.²⁸⁸ Now, if one were to not lie to the murderer, one might have two options. The first option is to not say anything, since Kant advocates that one must be honest “in statements that one cannot avoid.” The other option is to tell the truth, but that does not mean one must allow the murderer into the house. Interestingly, though, if one was going to deny the murderer

²⁸⁶ Immanuel Kant, “On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy,” in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. by Mary J. Gregor, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008) 8:426.

²⁸⁷ Immanuel Kant, “On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy,” 8:427.

²⁸⁸ Immanuel Kant, “On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy,” *ibid.*

access to one's home on the grounds that he is obviously looking to kill someone, Kant might have argued that this would not be permissible according to the formulation of humanity. The murderer, no matter how deranged he looks, must be treated as a rational (and, therefore, moral) agent, and to assume that his intended course of action is an immoral and irrational one, is to treat him as a non-rational being, which necessarily does not possess unconditional worth. If one is unable to stop the murderer from entering, Kant still holds that telling the truth was the right thing to do, since there is still the possibility that one's neighbors could help apprehend the criminal.²⁸⁹ Essentially, Kant seems to be advocating the position that one is not responsible for the consequences of upholding duty by carrying out "good" actions, while one is responsible for the consequences of "bad" actions, however unintended they may be. Hence, Kant shows very little consideration for what we might call "moral luck."

Kant's characterization of lying may also have some problematic implications for what types of deception may be permissible, despite his apparent absolutist viewpoint. He defines a lie as "an intentionally untrue declaration to another."²⁹⁰ In this way, for something to count as impermissible deception, it must be a blatant communication (since a declaration can be spoken or written) to another. However, we might recall the notion that one can deceive in subtler, more tacit, ways from our earlier discussion of the concept of management in Grotius' work. Sometimes, one can deceive by saying nothing at all, merely through one's behavior. For example, if

²⁸⁹ Immanuel Kant, "On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy," *ibid.*

²⁹⁰ Immanuel Kant, "On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy," 8:426.

the murderer were to ask me where my friend is, and I were to intentionally look at him silently, with a look of puzzlement on my face, the murderer may very well believe that my friend was not in the house. Under these circumstances, I would not have committed a wrong action by staying silent, and would therefore not be responsible for the consequences of my not saying anything. The maxim that I could use my behavior to deceive others, as long as I am always honest in my overt communications may also pass the test of the categorical imperative. If everyone were to act in a manner that was not in-line with their intentions while remaining truthful in other respects, everyone would know this, and would also know that they must wait for a direct answer as to what others' intentions are before acting in response to their behavior (there is nothing necessarily contradictory about this). I am also not treating people any less rationally by being selective in the type of behavior I show them, since they are still free to come to their own judgments about what my intentions are while I have simply remained silent. Although it might be difficult to consider this type of deception "lying," it is nonetheless an occurrence of intentional deception, and could be used to malicious effect; yet, Kant's moral system does not account for this.

Another possible objection to Kant's moral system may be made in response to his notion that there is such a thing as a manner of reason that is universally right, that can also be attained and comprehended by every human being. Kant did understand that people reason differently, and have greater and lesser degrees of rational capabilities, and this becomes especially clear in his political philosophy;

specifically in his arguments concerning the need for a government and a supreme legislator. A state, for Kant, exists for the purpose of securing its citizens with rights, which are limitations on the freedom of every individual such that the pursuit of happiness and a life consistent with moral law becomes possible.²⁹¹ This requires laws, and a supreme legislator who can craft those laws. The laws created by the supreme legislator do not just allow for the pursuit of happiness however. More importantly, these laws ideally provide answers to questions of how to apply the categorical imperative in specific instances. In this way, the state becomes an adjudicator of reason; it is meant to tell citizens how to apply the law, and it enforces the law as well. That is one of the reasons why Kant argues that the supreme legislator can never be disobeyed. Kant holds that, if the people were fit to recognize the right course of action, and they disagreed with the sovereign, another (superior) head of state would be required to judge in such instances, and that would be contradictory (i.e. there cannot be a supreme ruler of a state if there is another ruler above him).²⁹² This aspect of Kant's political theory reveals that he understood that people might not agree, or reason correctly, when it comes to the application of the categorical imperative. Yet, he attempted to provide a solution to this problem by making the ultimate decision of how to apply one's moral judgment contingent upon the reasoning of the head of state, who (being mortal) is also liable to misjudge the correct application of a normative standard. Hence there is little assurance that we can

²⁹¹ Immanuel Kant, "On The Common Saying: That May Be Correct in Theory," in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. by Mary J. Gregor, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008) 8:298.

²⁹² Immanuel Kant, "On The Common Saying: That May Be Correct in Theory," 8:300.

safely assume another person's ethical reasoning, let alone our own, can be a solid indicator of the right course of action. Perhaps this is something that Kant alluded to when he wrote, "we can never, even by the most strenuous self-examination, get entirely behind our covert incentives, since, when moral worth is at issue, what counts is not actions, which one sees, but those inner principles of actions that one does not see."²⁹³

❖ *Nietzsche's Response to Kant* ❖

Nietzsche was certainly influenced by Kant in his own works. His notion that we can never directly interact with the world outside of us may be described as a reformulation of Kant's notions of the world of appearances (*phenomena*) and the world of things in themselves (*noumena*). However, Nietzsche did not concur with Kant's view of basing ethics upon the possibility that we might be free in the noumenal sense, because he felt that doing this led Kant back into accepting things such as God, the soul, and freedom (things that Nietzsche acknowledges Kant to have almost broken away from), which he had earlier posited as unknowable due to their residence in the noumenal realm we can never have knowledge of.²⁹⁴ Even Kant's notion of happiness (which amounts to the satisfaction of all of one's desires²⁹⁵) was constructed in such a way that one would have to believe in God, and the immortality of the soul in order to be realized or brought to fruition.²⁹⁶ One could argue that

²⁹³ Immanuel Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," 4:407.

²⁹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 188.

²⁹⁵ Immanuel Kant, "Critique of Practical Reason," in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. by Mary J. Gregor, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), 5:124.

²⁹⁶ Immanuel Kant, "Critique of Practical Reason," *ibid.*

Nietzsche saw a similar kind of hatred for life in Kant's philosophy that he also saw in Plato's work; a denial of the world we actually inhabit in favor of another world we can never know exists, and (as we have already seen) Nietzsche believed that nihilism is the logical conclusion of such world-views.

Keeping in mind Nietzsche's belief that our passions necessarily will inform and guide us to what we come to value, it is easy to see why he might have taken issue with Kant's approach to morality; especially the way Kant grounded his ethics and political views in his notion of pure practical reason. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche claims that Kant, and other rationalists like him, posed "as if they had discovered and reached their real opinions through the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely unconcerned dialectic... while at bottom it is an assumption... most often a desire of the heart that has been filtered and made abstract."²⁹⁷ Such philosophers then hold up their opinions as objective truths, and find reasons to support them "after the fact."²⁹⁸ This is certainly possible in Kant's case, because much of Kant's work seems to reiterate and support his devoutly religious beliefs. Also, Kant's insistence that a moral obligation must be universal and objective for it to hold or possess value is exactly what Nietzsche sees as motivating the disorientation of the nihilists. This is something he attempts to grapple with, as described in the first chapter, by trying to make the nihilists see that all values have been subjectively created, thus trying to make them question the proposition that a value must be objective for it to be valuable. Furthermore, Nietzsche would most

²⁹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 12.

²⁹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *ibid.*

probably have taken issue with Kant's notion of the moral agent as one who is able to deliberate about what is worth pursuing from a perspective that is separated from his passions (this is a similar line of reasoning that Nietzsche uses to explain his distrust for the motivating factors that lead Kant to develop his theory). Ultimately, Kant's views may have represented, for Nietzsche, a return to the absolutism and slave-morality of Judeo-Christianity, which is predicated on self-denial and denial of possibly life-affirming capacities and talents in man.

❖*How the Enlightenment's Torch Goes Out*❖

What seems to have been made clear by the Enlightenment is that, in striving to find a faculty within us that could act as a reliable moral compass or gauge, the inadequacies of our faculties were revealed to be a formidable obstacle obstructing the way of a universal, objective, ethical and political system. Our faculties of intuition and emotion vary greatly among people, and so arguably does our faculty of reason. That any one judgment that utilizes these faculties could be characterized as true of every person, or every circumstance, was inevitably going to be called into question. However, questioning our ability to know the truth, as well as the ethical truth, could only raise more questions. Without a way of securing the moral truth about when, or whether, it is right to lie, what more could be said for deception, and the role it plays in human life? Without a secure, normative, landmark, how else was man supposed to navigate the ethical geography of his life, and what place was left for morality? These questions would become the major issues to be addressed in the time which ensued after the Enlightenment, although not without some conflict.

Chapter 5: Concluding Remarks and The Place of Lying in Liberal Democracy

By the end of the 18th century, a revolutionary movement aimed at reforming states to embrace Republican models of government had begun in the American colonies and had quickly spread to France. People began calling for more liberal and democratic values and institutions that could allow citizens to have more say in the political affairs of state, which also meant the ability to hold politicians accountable for any forms of deceptive behavior. The war of independence in the United States, and the 1789 revolution in France did not put an end to the bloody push towards democracy however. Throughout the 19th century, wars in Italy, France, and Prussia (to name a few) broke out as attempts were made to solidify these nations into states that had constitutions, and more political participation. Perhaps, all of this created the conditions for a violent backlash in the 20th century against liberal democratic values, and this harsh rejection of changing political and ethical circumstances took the form of totalitarianism. Once the evil flames of totalitarian regimes had been quelled long enough to start rebuilding, the West began a gradual progression towards the establishment of what it primarily is today: a liberal democratic West. Arguably, the West turned to liberal democratic models of government in hopes of avoiding the problems of past regimes, including the possibly dangerous consequences of lying in politics.

Along with the lessons of history, the western political and philosophical disciplines of today have also inherited a mixed assortment of profound, yet conflicting, ideas concerning the permissibility and value of deception.

Consequentialist modes of thought may lead one to accept lying as an acceptable means to desirable ends, yet more deontological perspectives still seem to focus on intrinsic properties of lying, or what is generally negative about lying. Interestingly, these two ways of assessing the moral status of deception, along with other views, seem to inhabit the same, muddled, space in many people's minds. Individuals might generally speak of lying as a wrong done unto others, yet may be far more likely to justify it on a personal basis when it is they themselves that must carry out such an action. There is nothing new about the ethical confusion surrounding the concept of deception, since arguments for and against it have existed since the ancient Greeks, who many consider to have had a much more homogenous, or shared, value system within which they could effectively debate the normative status of certain practices than we currently can in our cosmopolitan and pluralist society. However, perhaps the most notable aspect of the on-going debate concerning the problem of lying that has been subject to change is the scale of confusion. A kinder way to phrase it is that we have a much more complex and intricate understanding of the different facets of deception today than the ancient Christians (for example) understood. Yet, how is this more complex understanding of service to us? The fact remains that while theorists in the fields of politics and ethics might have the resources to develop a rewarding opinion on deceit, most people do not have the training, time, or willingness to evaluate (or, re-evaluate, in some cases) the values they live by. All of this is not to say, however, that little progress has been made to further understand lying in modernity. One might rather say that contemporary theorists are focusing more on our

confusions now than ever before, which means to say that they are beginning to address the *real* problem. Arguably, the problem is not so much that lies exist, or that we tell lies; the thing that makes deception problematic is how we have been conditioned to respond to it (either by nature or nurture). With some thinkers believing lies to be morally permissible, others believing lies to be biologically or psychologically necessary, and others seeing the path to hell as being paved with the wanton deceptive behavior of politicians, we must conclude this genealogy with an examination of the implications of lying and deception being practiced in liberal democratic states.

❖*Methods of Protecting Valuable Deception*❖

Having traced the genealogy of the mixed inheritance of ideas we possess today concerning the normative status of lying in light of Nietzsche's philosophical approach to values and the place that lies and fiction-making inhabit in our lives, one might raise the question: "what have the previous chapters shown?" Deception on an individual, societal, and political basis can be used to lend meaning to the lives of citizens and inspire people to greatness. It can also facilitate a better working society (as a tool for the establishment and maintenance of society), and personal human psychology. One need not sacrifice the natural inclinations to create and disseminate fictions in favor of the equally natural inclinations we have to understand, attribute order to our world, and share in a common life with others, since the natural inclinations that many today consider to be "insidious" may support and underwrite the drives we have come to elevate as "morally worthy." Very importantly, an

appreciation for the practical value of truth and the related virtue of truthfulness can co-exist with an appreciation for the values of cunning, imaginative fiction-making, and deception for morally worthy, life affirming, ends. If a lie can succeed where the truth cannot in lending meaning, or security and stability, to life, and in convincing individuals to live in such a way that they would see their lives as worthy of re-living, then to not lie would be an act of the greatest cruelty (many would argue that that is exactly the role that religion has played throughout history).

This is not to say that all lies are good, or morally permissible, since we also know that a lie under certain conditions can also be a great act of cruelty. We must implement certain principles that might better direct our valuation of dishonesty and our attempts to serve life through politics (or to affirm political life). I would argue that each of my previous chapters may provide examples of such principles. With the first chapter and its discussion of Nietzsche's ideas concerning the potentially fruitful use of lying in society in order to create a common, invigorating, reality for its members, I suggest that it would not be implausible for a state, or society, to make use of fiction-crafting to good effect, as long as the power to create fictions is not ultimately left in the hands of one person, or a small group. This principle takes into account the fear that Nietzsche shared with Arendt that a mad totalitarian could sabotage the evolution of culture with weak and cruel fictions that are hostile to life, humanity and history.

In the second chapter's discussion of Plato's ideal usage of political lies in contrast with a Nietzschean perspective, one might infer that a government must

refrain from putting up obstacles that hinder citizens from continuing to ask questions: questions concerning the values of the community and state, as well as questions concerning the truthfulness of their politicians' claims. Plato, albeit unintentionally, seems to show us that, without a public venue where ideas and values can be debated, created, and (in some cases) nullified, the state ceases to allow the progress of its citizens and their ability to contemplate which values serve their lives. Hence, it is of the utmost necessity that rights to free speech, free press, and free assembly are never absolutely done away with. There are legitimate arguments to be made for curbing these rights at times in order to uphold social and political stability; however, I maintain that these rights must not be interfered with to the point where the actions of a state (whether directed towards other states, or towards its own people) cannot be publicly addressed, evaluated, or challenged if need be. History has shown these conditions can only bring instability, and a loss of value for political life. Furthermore, aside from the negative liberties mentioned above, one might also suggest that positive liberties such as upholding the rights of citizens to acquire a decent education, and to pursue further discoveries in the scientific, medical, political and social fields must also be protected and encouraged (e.g. through grants, scholarships, and federal funding). If a state does not take measures against leaving their citizens in the dark when it comes to circumstances that might affect them, citizens will never have the means to challenge political claims, or discover lies that threaten the stability and culture of a society. Again, history has proven what happens when people's access to the truth is ruthlessly controlled: the people themselves stand

in great danger, and they also stand in danger of becoming a threat themselves (e.g. the reign of terror that followed the French revolution).

In chapter three, I would argue that the discussion of the decay of absolutism that lead to the creation of the political realist perspective reveals that lies will always be a part of politics and social relationships, since it is one way to exercise and control the power of one's state and other states (as well as societal members and institutions). However, that does not mean that politicians should not be held accountable by the people for their lies, especially when they harm their own citizens by exercising power selfishly, and wantonly (e.g. the manner of rulership a Hobbesian sovereign is liable to utilize). Not only must politicians be held accountable via the scrutiny of public, political deliberation; their ability to exercise power must also be accounted for through legitimate procedures of election, impeachment (if not by the people directly, then indirectly through the citizens' representatives), and judicial hearings. Just as cultures change, political institutions need to be dynamic enough to change with the values of citizens. It may very well be true that no government will ever be able to satisfy the values of every citizen, but that is why methods need to be in place for citizens to play a role in changing their governments when the state cannot even satisfy the values that the majority of citizens agree on. If a referendum shows that a majority of citizens disagree with a particular lie told by a politician, that politician must be confronted with the threat of instability posed by a dissatisfied majority, and he must have the chance to either acquiesce to the will of the people, or defend his actions publicly. The majority is not always correct in their political and

ethical judgments, but history has shown that an angry majority can pose one of the biggest threats to the security of society. It should be said that even Nietzsche (who held the idea of the rule of the majority in contempt) would agree to the proposition that, no matter how strong the ruling regime might be, all it takes is a disgruntled populace with a set of shrewd leaders at the helm to displace the authority and values of the regime incumbent. One might question whether the ancient elites who Nietzsche revered might have fared better if they had been willing to make occasional concessions to their slaves, such that their culture could evolve and, thus, better support the lives of both the people and their rulers.

Finally, in the fourth chapter, the message one might take away from the examination of the place of our emotions and reason in our ethical judgments concerning deception might ultimately be that one's reason to lie cannot be better justified than by simply appealing to one's sentiments and how those sentiments are mediated by one's reason (with both passions and reason being equally fallible and prone to error). One's justification for a lie will always be dubious (as might one's rationale for telling the truth), yet, despite this, that does not mean that we cannot have better passions and reasons to act on. Along with the protection of public forums where citizens can exchange ideas and expose each other to different values, the citizens themselves must generally try to cultivate a less self-righteous (and hypocritical) perspective with which to judge the lies of others. The fostering of this perspective may be served by protecting rights to free speech, and education, but it may also be served by politicians changing their rhetoric. If politicians always use the

charge of deceitful behavior to cast shadows over the activities of their opponents in the eyes of the people, citizens will be less likely to approve of lies being told to them by politicians (even the lies told by politicians who rely on accusing others of being dishonest). Politicians could help to facilitate a change in the perspectives of citizens by occasionally acknowledging that, despite being politically opposed to another politician or group, they themselves would have been willing to tell the same lies had their roles been reversed. This simple extension of political empathy, if it resulted in a more understanding view of deception in the citizenry, could stand to make at least two important differences in politics as it is practiced today: 1) politicians could avoid their attention being diverted away (by allegations of petty deception) from important matters that impact state security, and 2) citizens could also avoid their attention being channeled towards petty instances of deception, when there might be more serious, threatening occurrences of deception at work.

When we look at the proposals above, one cannot help but notice that liberal democratic states (i.e. most states in the West) tend to have most of these qualities to greater and lesser degrees (e.g. perhaps with the exception of guaranteeing a right to education, and most certainly with the exception of appearing permissive, in any way, of deception as a practice in politics). I see these proposed remedies to the problems involved with lying in politics as being practicable in any government that primarily concerns itself with the protection of certain core liberties that are afforded to its citizens in accordance with an established constitution that serves as a guideline for the state. Moreover, I would argue that the pursuit of the affirmation of life is

especially suited for such liberal democratic regimes, since the relationship between a government and its citizens in the liberal democratic model is one in which the citizens are empowered to pursue their own goals in life, and the government is ideally in charge of ensuring that this remains so. I believe that the measures, or principles, I have proposed would serve to enhance life (and its affirmation) for citizens and politicians alike in such states, if put into practice. However, one must distinguish between a measure that is practicable, and a measure that is fail-safe. Arguably, even if the rights of citizens are protected in such a way so as to allow for the public to assess claims made by politicians, the possibility of political and social deception wreaking havoc on society may still be a persistent threat, which warrants further discussion.

❖ *Liberal Democracy: A Solution to Political Lies?* ❖

Despite any arguments one might make for the value of lying on an individual basis, or on the societal scale, there is the ever-present concern about lying in the high-stakes arena of politics in liberal democratic states. In his book, *Why Leaders Lie*, John J. Mearsheimer finds that world leaders (even in the West) are more likely to lie to their own people, given the chance, than they are to other world leaders.²⁹⁹ This runs into conflict with the attitudes that many governments and their people share: that lying is far more justifiable in the international realm of politics where an absence of enforceable moral principles necessitates doing whatever is necessary to secure one's own nation, rather than in domestic politics where leaders (at least in the

²⁹⁹ John J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie*, (Oxford: Oxford UP. 2011), 6.

liberal West) can often times be held accountable for their unlawful, or unethical actions by their constituents.³⁰⁰ Now, regardless of whether it is true that states lie to their own people more than they do to other states (Mearsheimer claims that he came to his conclusion largely because he found it far more difficult to find examples of international, political lies than domestic ones,³⁰¹ but one might suggest that a lack of evidence does not necessarily prove that leaders lie less to other countries than they do to their own), it is still valuable to look at the reasons Mearsheimer offers to support what he found. He argues that inter-state lying is rarer than inner-state deception, because it is harder to actually pull the wool over the eyes of another state when all states know that holding a state's officials accountable for their actions, and lies, is particularly difficult in the international arena, and general suspicion of the intentions and statements of different governments is the norm.³⁰² Mearsheimer argues that there is a larger degree of trust possessed by citizens for their government, and this makes lying to them all the more easy, yet states will also avoid lying to other states for fear of endangering strategic arrangements and relationships that are meant to benefit the well-being of their own countries.³⁰³ However, the latter reason (that lying can endanger national well-being), also applies to inner-state lying and, for that reason, may lend more legitimacy to the claim that states do not lie to each other when they habitually suspect one another. In fact, one might suggest that inner-state

³⁰⁰ John J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie*, 8.

³⁰¹ John J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie*, 13.

³⁰² John J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie*, 100.

³⁰³ John J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie*, *ibid.*

lying may pose a similar, if not more serious, threat to a state's well-being as well as its place in the world.

One might examine the potential dangers of inner-state deception by taking an example from recent history. One such danger is well-articulated by David Runciman in his book, *The Politics of Good Intentions*. Runciman recognized a heightened use of what he calls, "the language of risk," in American and British political rhetoric just after the tragic attacks that took place on September 11th, that allowed the political leaders of both states an "open-endedness [that] empowers politicians, placing a premium on decisive action-- any decisive action-- in the face of uncertainty."³⁰⁴

When politicians emphasize, or take out of context, the risks that may, or may not, be involved in a proposed action, they gain the "twin luxuries of certainty and uncertainty," such that they can galvanize the public to support an action (for the risks would be too great otherwise), or oppose an action (for the risks would be too great if the action were to be carried through).³⁰⁵ Since there are nearly always risks involved in political action, as well as abstaining from political action, the risks that politicians make reference to need not be imaginary ones, but the focus of their rhetoric can be employed to make certain risks sound more or less dangerous depending on their intended course of action. Runciman sees politicians like Tony Blair as having used this form of language, not necessarily to lessen people's perceptions of the risks involved in fighting a war in the middle-east, but rather to "raise the spectre of the total unmanageability of the new world order, so long as the threat of terrorism cannot

³⁰⁴ David Runciman, *The Politics of Good Intentions*, (New Jersey: Princeton UP. 2006),10.

³⁰⁵ David Runciman, *The Politics of Good Intentions*, 10-11.

be contained.”³⁰⁶ Essentially, one might interpret Tony Blair’s use of rhetoric as being pointed at the destabilization of British society in order to make the public more accepting and dependent on the proposals made by their government, which eventually may have paved the way for entering into the costly and politically damaging war in Iraq. However, as the name of Runciman’s book suggests, the path to the war in Iraq was most likely paved with good intentions on the part of those who advocated the war, yet the methods they used to garner support were still forms of deception that made society feel and behave less secure, which is arguably a threat to the on-going valuation of political values, and political realities, by society members.

When considering political deception, the possible threat still remains for liberal democracies: politicians might believe a lie, or deceitful act, to be beneficial for the security and stability of the state in the long-run, and they might disseminate a lie that, ultimately, goes unchecked by the institutions and measures that are in place for the purpose of guarding against such deception. This possibility presents a serious challenge to my argument for the use of democratic institutions in dealing with the murky issue of lies in politics. Democratic institutions are capable of being taken advantage of and bypassed by politicians, and this can make attempts by citizens to find the truth problematic. Furthermore, a politician might believe that a certain lie might serve life, and may allow for the creation of new values by citizens, and this too might result in social and political instability despite the lie even being well-considered, and well-intentioned. Again, this is another serious challenge that my

³⁰⁶ David Runciman, *The Politics of Good Intentions*, 11.

arguments cannot fully remedy. There is always an amount of moral luck involved in lying, just as there is in any other political action, and human beings do not have perfect foresight. One might suggest, however, that these potential dangers that still lurk in liberal democratic societies only necessitates that governments implement as many ways as possible to check the potential threats that lies pose. By offering more progressive, and imaginative ways to encourage and enable the public to be more engaged in trying to discover the lies that really threaten their lives (as opposed to the lies that politicians draw their attention to so as to gain from their outrage and fear), the problems associated with lying could stand to be better dealt with, and the use of lies may find a more legitimate place in politicians' methods of serving citizens and their lives. The measures I have suggested are, by themselves, limited in their potential to affect political and social life, but taken together (perhaps, along with measures that appeal to others), they stand the chance to make a difference.

❖ *Concluding Remarks* ❖

It seems crucial to me that individuals need to have values that guide the use of their lies, as well as the rest of their actions; that is, human beings need values to make not only their actions, but also their lives, meaningful. Concerning these values, we must understand that we cannot rely so much on the values we are given by others (society, state, family, etc.), but we must consider them and question them. We ought to question our own values too (the ones we create) from time to time, so that we can choose to reaffirm our belief in their value, or so we can reject them and find more life-serving values. Morality and ethics are not so bound up in acting rightly or

wrongly according to objectively good maxims or principles. Man is yet to prove that such rules actually exist, and trying to prove their existence gets in the way of our acknowledgement of the pressing, decision-necessitating, conditions we find ourselves in. It is about continuously trying to examine our actions and motives, so that we can decide, or create rather, their normative value. If we consider our moral system to be set, and concrete, to the point where we can only follow our rules blindly, we may come to forget this fundamental ability to question. We must ensure that the day does not arrive when we might say that “morality (whether in politics or society) is dead.”

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