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EDITOR: Jörg Meibauer

TITLE: The Oxford Handbook of Lying

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SUMMARY

In the preface to the Oxford Handbook of Lying, its editor Jörg Meibauer tells us that the handbook is the first of its kind, namely the first "collection of in-depth research surveys on lying and deception" (p. ix). Somewhat surprisingly, Meibauer also says that he would have wished that the book was even more comprehensive.

In the introductory chapter, Meibauer claims that "everyone is interested in" lying (p. 1). There, he discusses definitions of lying, the acquisition, processing and detection of lying, and the evaluation of lying. These are topics that recur in the book, which is divided into five parts. These parts are called "Traditions", "Concepts", "Types of lies and deception", "Distinctions", and "Domains".

The "Traditions" part of the book consists of overviews dealing with the philosophy of lying, and linguistic, psycholinguistic, and neurocognitive approaches to lying and deception. The "Concepts" part treats concepts that are separate from, but relevant to, discussions of lying, beginning from truth, assertion, and knowledge. As its name indicates, the "Types of lies and deception" section includes chapters on different types of lying and deception, for example, bald-faced lies and bullshitting. The chapters in the section on "Distinctions" distinguishes between lying and such things as fiction, irony, and hyperbole. Lastly, the section on "Domains" discusses various domains in which lying is being studied. These comprise, among others, computational linguistics, economics and the law, and the arts.

Since the book is so long, I will not attempt to cover it exhaustively, but will rather mention examples of things that are discussed in it. I will begin from the first part of the book and move in the order suggested by the book.

In his chapter on "Classic philosophical approaches to lying and deception", James Edwin Mahon treats, among other things, Plato's idea that lies can be good in some situations. Such situations include, for example, the upbringing of children, and the ruling of a nation. Basically, people who know something better than others may lie to those others to make them behave as wished.

The chapters "Contemporary approaches to the philosophy of lying" by James Edwin Mahon and "Linguistic approaches to lying and deception" by Karol J. Hardin discuss several different definitions of lying. While Mahon emphasizes that philosophers disagree about the characteristics of lying, Hardin suggests that the following is a "standard definition for lying" (tracing it back to Falkenberg 1982: 75; p. 57):

"S lied at t, if and only if

(a) S asserted at t that p,

(b) S actively believed at t that not p"

Hardin also quotes Anna Wierzbicka's definition of lying (p. 58; the reference is faulty), as follows:

X lied to Y

X said something to Y

X knew it was not true

X said it because X wanted Y to think it was true

[people would say: if someone does this, it is bad]

The chapter "Psycholinguistic approaches to lying and deception" has been written by Lewis Bott and Emma Williams, who discuss, among other things, the big question of whether "lying is more difficult than telling the truth" (p. 78). Lying could be expected to be difficult because it requires that one suppress the truth, invent an alternative story, and stick to it, all the time considering the perspective of the listener. However, lying does not necessarily lead to, for example, errors in speech, slower speech, or hesitations.

The big question in Chapter Six, "Lying, deception, and the brain" by Alexa Decker, Amanda Disney, Brianna D'Elia, and Julian Paul Keenan is: "When did the first human lie?" (p. 87). They approach this question by first thinking about animals and plants that somehow deceive other organisms, such as orchids who can "look like a female wasp, therefore attracting male wasps" for pollination (p. 84).

Chapter Seven, "Lying and truth" by Stephen Wright, begins the second part of the book, titled "Concepts". Other concepts discussed in this part of the book comprise assertion (author: Mark Jary), belief, and knowledge (Matthew A. Benton), sincerity, and quality (Andreas Stokke), deception (Andrew Ortony and Swati Gupta), certainty (Neri Marsili), omissions (Don Fallis), implicating and presupposing (Jörg Meibauer), self-deception (Kathi Beier), and lastly, testimony and epistemic vigilance (Eliot Michaelson).

The second part of the book contains many definitions of concepts and many examples of cases. One such case that is discussed many times in the book appears, for example, in Stokke's chapter on lying, sincerity and quality. It is the case of the cheating student. This is how Stokke explains the case (p. 137; referring to Carson 2006: 290):

A student accused of cheating on an exam is called to the Dean's office. The student knows that the Dean knows that she did in fact cheat. But as it is also well known that the Dean will not punish someone unless they explicitly admit their guilt, the student says,
(1) I did not cheat.

Many writers on lying think that, although the student says something she believes to be false, she does not intend to deceive the dean.

Stokke explains this case through referring to Grice's maxim of quality. It is relevant because rather than assuming that the "maxim of truthfulness is still in force and that the speaker believes what she has said" (p. 137; Wilson and Sperber 2002: 586), the Dean knows that the student is not telling the truth. Stokke points out that according to some authors, the student is not even lying because both the student and the Dean know the truth. Note that in this chapter, lying and deceiving do not mean the same thing, so that it is possible that the student is lying to but not deceiving the Dean.

Stokke begins his chapter with stating Grice's cooperative principle and his maxims of quality. This is relevant to mention not only because Stokke's chapter deals with quality but also because Grice's cooperative principle and maxims feature many times in different chapters in the book (Grice 1989: 26–27).

Andrew Ortony and Swati Gupta's chapter on "Lying and deception" is an interesting exception to the rest of the chapters in this part of the book because it is based on empirical data. They are interested in whether people lie because they want to promote themselves (promotion focus) or because they want to "avoid a loss (prevention focus)" (p. 150). They asked around a hundred people why they had lied the last time they lied. The result was that most people's lies focused on prevention rather than promotion.

Kathi Beier's chapter on "Lying and self-deception" is interesting because of the "paradoxical nature of self-deception" (p. 207). Beier quotes Demos (1960: 588; p. 207) who states this paradox as follows: "In short, self-deception entails that B believes both p and not-p at the same time". Beier explains that self-deception can also be understood in terms of someone "block[ing] a certain insight" (p. 208). However, there is also the "dynamic paradox" (p. 209): self-deception seems to be voluntary, but it cannot be intentional because then it would not work.

The term "epistemic vigilance" in Michaelson's chapter "Lying, testimony, and epistemic vigilance" refers to a hearer or reader's attitude towards what they are being told and to their ability to distinguish truth from lie. In his own way, Michaelson also treats a paradox because he

treats the question how it is possible to acquire knowledge from unreliable sources. He claims that when children grow up, they acquire plenty of knowledge from adults who are often unreliable sources of knowledge: "I think we very often lie to children about things we'd prefer not to explain to them" (p. 224).

Part Three of the book, "Types of lies and deception", is in the middle of the book and in some sense, it could be seen as the core of the book because it very much focuses on what lying and deception are in practice. It discusses knowledge lies and group lies (Julia Staffel), selfless assertions (Jennifer Lackey), bald-faced lies (Jörg Meibauer), bullshitting (Andreas Stokke), bluffing (Jennifer Perillo), and white and prosocial lies (Simone Dietz).

Staffel begins her chapter on knowledge lies and group lies with an example that occurs several times in the book. This is how she explains it (pp. 231-232):

A compelling example of a knowledge lie can be found in the movie *Spartacus* (directed by Stanley Kubrick, USA 1960). The Roman general Marcus Licinius Crassus is trying to find Spartacus among a group of slaves, and tells the group that if they identify him, their lives will be spared. Spartacus gets up to turn himself in, but as soon as he gets up, one slave after another rises and declares "I am Spartacus." All the slaves are lying, but when they repeat "I am Spartacus," their intention is not to convince the general of any particular false claim. They simply want to prevent him from knowing which of them is Spartacus (Sorensen 2010).

Staffel defines a group lie as follows (p. 239): "Group G lies to B if and only if (1) G states that p to B, (2) G believes that p is false, and (3) G intends to be deceptive to B with respect to whether p in stating that p." It is important to study group lies, for example, because companies and government authorities represent groups, and their representatives make statements that can sometimes be lies. In such situations, the study of group lies can help us decide who is or are responsible for the lie.

What is a "selfless assertion", then? This is how Lacey defines it (p. 248): "There are three central components to this phenomenon: first, a subject, for purely non-epistemic reasons, does not believe that p; second, despite this lack of belief, the subject is aware that p is very well supported by all of the available evidence; and, third, because of this, the subject asserts that p without believing that p." Lackey refers to a "classic instance of a selfless assertion" (p. 248; Lackey 2008: 48), a devoutly Christian school teacher who believes in creationism but teaches evolutionary theory to her pupils.

I have already mentioned an example of the category "Bald-faced lies" that are discussed by Meibauer in the chapter by the same name. It is the example of the cheating student and the Dean which reoccurs in Meibauer's chapter (p. 260). Meibauer also discusses several further examples of bald-faced lies such as the one that he titles "Don betrays Betty" where an unfaithful husband explains to his wife that he "spent the night in the office" although both know that this is not true (p. 261; Meibauer 2014: 140). The challenge that bald-faced lies present to research on lies has already been mentioned, that is, that it is possible to say that people who tell bald-faced lies do not intend to deceive. A similar condition applies to bullshitting, as suggested by Frankfurt (2005: 17; as quoted by Stokke, p. 265): "the orator does not really care what his audience thinks about the Founding Fathers, or about the role of the deity in our country's history, or the like. At least, it is not an interest in what anyone thinks about these matters that motivates his speech." Stokke, however, does not fully agree. He refers, for example, to propaganda that "is designed to make its audience believe particular things, even if the propagandist herself is indifferent toward them" (p. 268).

Perillo's example of "Bluffing" in the chapter by the same name gives an idea of how serious the consequences of bluffing can be. She mentions the case of the rape and murder of 15-year-old Angela Correa in 1989. The police told a suspect that "they would be testing the DNA evidence found inside Correa" (p. 277) and managed to acquire a false confession which led to the wrong person being imprisoned. Perillo points out that innocent suspects may confess to a crime under pressure while believing that their innocence will be proved later.

The fourth part of the book, titled "Distinctions", draws parallels and distinguishes between lying and fiction (Emar Maier), lying and quotation (Matthew S. McGlone and Maxim Baryshevsev), lying and humour (Marta Dynel), lying, irony, and default interpretation (Rachel Giora), lying and

vagueness (Paul Egré and Benjamin Icard), lying, metaphor, and hyperbole (Claudia Claridge), and lying and politeness (Marina Terkourafi).

In his chapter on "Lying and fiction", Maier discusses, among other things, in what sense it is true to say that "Sam carried Frodo from Mount Doom" (p. 303). He talks about the common ground, that is, the "shared body of information that the speaker and hearer take for granted" (p. 308), referring to Stalnaker's framework (1970, 1978).

McGlone and Baryshevtshev's chapter on "Lying and quotation" discusses the problems that occur when quotes are "truncat[ed] in a way that distorts the meaning of the excerpted words" (p. 316). They focus on, for example, the so-called "Yew tree controversy that plagued former Vice-President Al Gore in the late 1990s" (p. 319). Referring to a truncated quote from his 1992 book *Earth in the Balance*, his opponents suggested that he cared more for trees than people.

Dynel's examples of "Lying and humour" come from the medical drama "House". She discusses, among other things, lie-based teasing. Giora in her turn suggests that irony is the default interpretation of some utterances while it is the nondefault interpretation in other cases, making the latter related to lying. Egré and Icard's chapter on "Lying and vagueness" deals systematically with different kinds of vagueness. They draw a main dividing line between pragmatic imprecision and semantic indeterminacy. Claridge discusses such examples as "You look gorgeous today!" and "[on coming home late for dinner] There were thousands of people at Tesco" (p. 375).

Terkourafi begins her discussion of "Lying and politeness" with discussing white lies but then continues to blue, red, yellow, and green lies.

The fifth and last part of the book situates lying in domains of study. It begins with a chapter on the "Development of lying and cognitive abilities" (Victoria Talwar). It then discusses the domains of lie detection (Samantha Mann), computational linguistics (Kees van Deemter and Ehud Reiter), social psychology (Bella M. DePaulo), psychology (Kristina Suchotzki and Matthias Gamer), neuroscience (Giorgio Ganis), ethics (Thomas L. Carson), law (Stuart P. Green), economics (Marta Serra-Garcia), education (Anita E. Kelly), discourse analysis (Darius Galasiński), politics (Vian Bakir, Eric Herring, David Miller, and Piers Robinson), history (Thomas L. Carson), the arts (Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer), and different cultures (Fumiko Nishimura).

Talwar suggests that two cognitive abilities are required for a child to lie, the "ability to attribute mental states to oneself and others" (theory-of-mind, p. 403), and executive functioning which "refers to a set of higher-order psychological processes that serve to monitor and control thought and action" (p. 405; e.g., Zelazo and Müller 2002). In other words, children need to be able both to tell a convincing lie and to suppress the truth.

Mann tells us that plenty of "recent deception research has concentrated on developing methods that will make an interview situation harder for a liar than for a truth-teller" (p. 413). Such methods include imposing cognitive load, unexpected questions, discussing processes versus outcomes, asking about verifiable details, and the strategic use of evidence. The method of imposing cognitive load is based on the idea that lying is "often more difficult than telling the truth" (p. 413). Unexpected questions could include, for example, asking a person to draw the place where an event occurred. A person can also be asked about the "planning of an event, rather than the event itself" (p. 414).

DePaulo discusses various studies that answer the question how often people lie. She points out that the claim that "people tell three lies every ten minutes" is based on a mistaken account of a "study in which undergraduates had a ten-minute getting-acquainted conversation with another student (Feldman, Forrest, and Happ 2002)" (p. 438). In this study, forty percent of the students in fact told no lies, "and the others told an average of three lies in the ten-minute conversations" (p. 438).

As to the evaluation of lying, Carson discusses both authors who think that lying is absolutely wrong, such as Augustine and Kant, and the utilitarian idea that "one should always do whatever will have the best possible consequences" (p. 477), represented by, for example, Mill. However, he pays special attention to Ross's (2002[1930]: 20-21) "eight fundamental prima facie moral duties", the second of which is the "duty not to lie" (p. 478). Carson emphasizes that sometimes the duties can be in conflict and that therefore, according to Ross, there are situations where "lying is morally permissible" (p. 479).

In his chapter on "Lying and the law", Green discusses, for example, perjury, fraud, and rape by

deception. The latter includes cases where a victim is led to believe that they are “undergoing a medical procedure” or that they are “having sex with their spouse” (p. 488). Green also discusses lawyer and client lies and lies in politics and the media.

One of Galasiński’s examples of “Lying and discourse analysis” comes from doctor-patient interaction. He compares the doctor’s notes with the original discussion and observes that the notes distort what the patient says. Galasiński suggests that the “greatest value that can be gained from discourse analysis’ insights in misrepresentation/reception lies in its ability to probe actual communicative practices of social actors in a variety of contexts” (p. 525).

Carson discusses “[h]istorically important lies (told by leaders)” (pp. 543–548). In this category, he includes Roosevelt deceiving the public about “his intentions concerning war with Germany” (p. 543), and the Bush administration making false claims about Iraq in order to justify the 2003 Iraq war. Carson also discusses “[l]ying and deception about the historical record” (pp. 548–549), for example, Hitler’s lie in 1939 that Poland had attacked Germany.

Kümmerling-Meibauer asks, among other things, if pictures can lie. She mentions the case of “Cottingley Fairies”, a photograph “taken by two young girls in 1917” (p. 562). Although some people were critical of the photograph, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, for example, took it as a proof that fairies exist.

Nishimura reports a study comparing New Zealanders and Japanese people making excuses as to why they cannot join someone to a bar for a drink. Several of the Japanese speakers referred to their physical condition, while many of the New Zealanders referred to a prior engagement (Nishimura 2011: 180).

EVALUATION

Since the concept of “lying” is defined in many of the chapters, there is some repetition in the book. This is perhaps unavoidable and could also be seen as cohesion, as several of the authors refer, for example, to Grice’s maxims.

Some examples of cases also occur in more than one chapter. This suggests that there are some prototypical cases of lying that circulate in discussions about lying. It also suggests that many authors have summarized some of the most important studies on lying, which partially overlap from one chapter to another.

More generally, it seems evident that not everything in the book comes as a surprise to the reader. While some of the authors have even conducted new empirical studies on lying, others appear to repeat major facts.

At the same time, although Meibauer himself expresses a wish in the preface that the book be even more comprehensive, in my view, the strength of the book is precisely that it covers so many aspects of lying. It is a great achievement that one can compare views from various disciplines by simply leafing through one and the same book. The 71-page list of references is also a very valuable tool for anyone interested in doing research on lying.

A good way to approach the book is to read a little here and there instead of reading all the chapters in numerical order, as some of the chapters are heavier to read and others downright entertaining. The book is a treat to any academic interested in lies, lying, and deception.

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Heli Tissari works as an associate professor of English at Umeå University in Sweden. Her research interests include cognitive and corpus linguistics, emotions, English historical linguistics, and semantics. Her latest published work used Natural Semantic Metalanguage to explain the concept of 'chastity' in 18th century English.