

## **Ethics in Action in NPDA Debate: A Philosophical and Pragmatic Analysis of Macroscopic and Microscopic Elements of Lying in Parliamentary Debate**

*Skip Rutledge*

*Point Loma Nazarene University*

Questioning the moral legitimacy of lying is an age-old philosophical endeavor. This ethical inquiry is as important today as it was when ancient philosophers tackled it thousands of years ago. Contemporary newspapers have documented the pervasive and damaging extent of lying at many levels. The front page, or national section, reported that former President Clinton was impeached and will likely be denied a position of honor in the annals of American history because of his lying under oath about personal indiscretions to a grand jury. Similar flirtations with dishonesty may have cost his Vice President, Al Gore, the position as the nation's next president during the exceedingly close 2000 presidential campaign. He reportedly claimed, without support, to have invented the Internet, and that the novel *Love Story* was based on his life. The press exposed a number of other lies that occurred in the Presidential debates (Alter, 2000; Gore fibs, 2000; Gore tells, 2000; Parry, 2000; Will, 2000). Most were laid at Gore's feet, but some were also attributed to then Governor, now President Bush.

More recently, the business world has been rocked with claims of monumental lying and stock manipulation at Enron, WorldCom, and even Martha Stewart, Inc. These unprecedented levels of corporate fraud and dishonesty, even aided by some of the world's most well respected auditing firms, has significantly eroded investor confidence and wiped out the life savings and jobs of many trusting employees and investors who can least afford it.

Even the sports section of the paper exposes noteworthy dishonesty ("Irish Blarney," 2001). In December 2001, former Georgia Tech football coach George O'Leary was proudly fulfilling his life dream by accepting the coveted position as the head football coach for the prestigious University of Notre Dame's "Fighting Irish." Yet, the following day O'Leary resigned in national disgrace after being exposed for lying on his resume regarding academic and athletic accomplishments almost 20 years earlier. In 1999, Toronto Blue Jays coach Tim Johnson was fired after it was discovered that he had repeatedly lied about his military service in Viet Nam through stories he manufactured to motivate his players. Seattle Mariners outfielder Al Martin was also exposed as a liar for falsely claiming that he played for several years on the University of Southern Califor-

nia football team. This is the same Al Martin that several years earlier as a San Diego Padre baseball player made national headlines for being criminally investigated for bigamy in Arizona.

Speaking of bigamous Padres, even the Catholic Church has not escaped claims of lying. They have been accused of committing lies of commission and omission surrounding their inadvisable handling in past years of the priests accused of child molestation and worse. Academia is not exactly guilt free regarding honesty violations. The results of a new survey of 12,000 high school students across the nation was just released by the Josephson Institute of Ethics in Marina del Rey, which found that "they are cheating, lying and stealing more than ever and are less concerned about it than in the past." (Sauer and Garin, 2002, p. A 1). They continue, " (It) found that 74 percent of students admitted to cheating on an exam at least once in the past year, compared with 61 percent in the institutes 1992 survey." Academics cannot just point to students, but must realize that many of their colleagues are also lying. Yang (2002, p. B 1 - B 5) cites many recent examples of college and university professors and administrators lying on their resumes, including most recently Quincy Troupe, U C San Diego Professor and State Poet Laureate.

So as is documented from the headlines in the front pages and the national section, to the sports, business, campus and even religion sections, liars surround us. Clearly the fashion and entertainment sections could even more easily document that things are not as they seem. But we have become a little used to seeing levels of dishonesty in these other realms, it is unfortunate that we must also admit that it is becoming pervasive in academia as well.

This paper will first examine lying from a general philosophical perspective. It will then analyze lying in academic debate. Academic debate is a competitive game-like environment that serves as a training ground for many that go into politics and business, as well as many other positions of leadership and public service. Academic debate, specifically the format known as parliamentary debate as practiced by the National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA), will provide a rich area of analysis to grapple with both the macroscopic and microscopic ethical dilemmas regarding lying. At the macroscopic level, the paper will examine the morality of debaters advocating positions sometimes diametrically opposed to their own personal convictions. It will also examine dishonest practices within the activity at the microscopic level, such as advancing one side's arguments by willfully misrepresenting known facts. Such practices represent the single biggest threat to the activity of parliamentary debate and perhaps to other forms of academic and/or political debate as well. Finally, some suggestions will be made to limit such unethical practices and abuses.

## Philosophical Overview of Lying in General

### *Lying Defined*

When attempting unsuccessfully to define pornography, Justice Potter Stewart once noted (roughly paraphrased) I may not be able to tell you what pornography is, but I know it when I see it [Jacobellis v. Ohio, 378 U.S. 184, 197 (1964)]. Unfortunately, lies can be even harder to recognize, let alone define, than pornography. Yet, in the aggregate, Americans apparently have no problem utilizing lies on a daily basis. Rodgers (1989) pointed out that according to one unnamed study we lie "an average of 13 times a week" (p. 33). She continued by explaining:

The very language of lies suggests their widespread utility. We falsify, misstate, misrepresent, gloss over, disguise, color and varnish the truth. We doctor, cook, fake, adulterate, dress up, embroider, invent, trump, forge and in political campaigns, spin it. We concoct, equivocate, quibble, trim, shuffle, prevaricate, perjure, mystify, dissemble, evade, trick, exaggerate, beguile, double-tongue and cant, too. (p. 33)

Constructing a functional definition for lying is critical to any meaningful discourse surrounding the phenomena. Various definitions can range from intentionally malicious deceptive declarations, to good-natured jokes and pranks, to social niceties and misunderstandings, or even inadvertently misleading claims born of ignorance and confusion. It would be helpful to look at some of the elements most often associated with lying.

### *Elements Associated with Lying*

*Truth.* Some might consider a lie as that which is without truth, or detracts from the truth. But that might presuppose the foundational necessity of actually knowing what the truth is. Philosophers have toiled over this epistemological issue for thousands of years. It is unlikely that this paper could settle that definitional question. It will be necessary therefore to explore other ways of determining what a lie is.

*Intent and Perception.* Though it may not be possible to ascertain all the complexities of what truth is, it is first important to consider the issues of intent and perception. For the purposes of this analysis *a lie will require the intentional misrepresentation of what the liar perceives to be the truth.* So, if asked what time it was, the responder would be lying under this definition if she reported the time, as other than she perceived it to be. Merely reporting the wrong time because of relying on a faulty time-piece would not be sufficient to make the response a lie, especially if the

respondent had no idea the timepiece was flawed.

To its benefit, this approach sidesteps the inherent epistemological difficulties of assessing knowledge, or the necessity of discerning how one can actually know anything. As long as one thinks one knows something, and is intentionally misrepresenting that understanding, that is sufficient for the first element of this paper's conceptualization of lying.

*Effects.* Additionally, good intentions, or operating under the perception that the person being lied to is in a better state because of the lie, cannot negate or erase a lie at a definitional level. A lie is a lie regardless of the effects of the lie. The moral justifications and normative claims regarding the utilitarian ends of lies will be dealt with elsewhere. The only aspect of intent that is important at a definitional level is the intent to deceive. Therefore, the working definition thus far of a lie is *the willful misrepresentation of what one communicator perceives to be the truth with the intent to deceive others*. It is now important to examine other aspects of truth telling and lies as discussed by philosophers through the ages.

#### *Philosophical Approaches to Lying through the Ages*

It is not possible within the confines of this paper to explicate the contributions of all philosophers and ethicists through the ages. The paper attempts to limit its scope to a few key contentions of western thought dating back to ancient Greece. Other contributions from sources outside these parameters would no doubt be interesting, but should be raised by those with more expertise and the time to more fully explore them. Several important questions will be examined in the hope that the discussion over lying in general will prove to be of some benefit when applied more specifically to the arena of interscholastic parliamentary debate. We will be exploring possible exceptions or excuses that might be raised in defense of lying in academic debating.

Jonsen and Toulmin (1988) provided an overview of the problem by pointing out contradictions or at least reservations through the ages on this topic.

The moralists of antiquity had praised truth and condemned falsehood. Aristotle wrote, "Falsehood is in itself mean and culpable, and truth noble and full of praise." Yet the ancients had tolerated and even recommended certain kinds of deception: for the rulers of the Republic, Plato's "noble lie" was an actual obligation. (p. 195)

Jonsen and Toulmin added that this morass of uncertainty even extended to some of the Christian leadership of the time as well.

The Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, condemned the liar in strong terms: "Jahweh hates all workers of iniquity: He will destroy all that speak a lie" (Ps 5:7). Yet, early Christian moralists could not help but be perplexed by certain episodes related in the Scriptures, such as the Israelite women lying to Pharaoh and the supposedly omniscient Jesus declaring that he "knew not the day nor the hour" of the Last Judgment. Indeed, although the wrongness of deception was widely recognized, the practice of deception was not uniformly condemned in the early Christian community. (pp. 195 - 196)

#### *Why is Lying Presumptively Wrong?*

Many of the ancient Greek philosophers believed the noblest calling was to be a philosopher, or seeker of truth. Plato and Socrates utilized, amongst other forms of inquiry, dialogue. Through asking and answering gradually more specific avenues of inquiry one was able to narrow in on important truths. But this could only work if the interlocutors were committed to at least attempting to engage in honest communication. Epictetus, for example, said in the first century A. D., "The primary and most necessary part of philosophy is the application of the principles, as for instance the principle not to speak falsely" (as quoted in Bok, 1978, p. 11).

It is fairly easy to see then why Socrates was opposed to the Sophists, who were accused of teaching style over substance. They instructed their students in how to triumph in argument and delivery, regardless of the merits of the position being advocated or presumably of the veracity of the claims. This statement begs the bigger question of what truth is. Since the Sophists made no such claim to understanding let alone promoting truth, they felt open to instruct more freely upon the effectiveness of the means of delivery rather than focusing on the legitimacy of the ends being pursued.

#### *Is Lying Always Wrong?*

St. Augustine took a fairly hard line against lying. He frequently dismissed the justifications for lies with wit and humor. For example, Augustine was once asked, as told in his essay "Against Lying" (shown in Bok, 1978, p.268), about a case where a seriously ill father would probably die if told the truth about his only son that had unbeknownst to the father recently passed away. It was argued, "truth would then be a homicide." Refusing to grant that such an example would be justified, he

countered by asking about another hypothetical case. "Why, if a shameless woman expects to be defiled and then dies of her fierce love because you do not consent, will chastity also be the homicide?" (p. 269).

Bok (1978) explained that St. Augustine ruled out all lies. "He cut a swath through all the earlier opinions holding that some lies might be justified. He claimed that God forbids all lies and that liars therefore endanger their immortal souls" (p. 35). She added though that he admitted that there are different levels of lies, of which he categorized eight.

Of the modern philosophers, Kant (1787/1965; 1785/1983) probably took the strongest, most absolute stance that lying is always unacceptable. His rationale was based in part on the categorical imperative that suggested that we should never take an action that we would not want everyone to take. For example, we should keep our promises because we would want others to keep their promises. To better understand his position, it might help to remember that a check is a promise to pay. The economy would come to a crashing halt should society decide it is not necessary to honor one's checks. Currency is also in essence promissory notes issued by the government. Try to imagine the devastation if the government no longer honored its currency. Bok (1978) added, "Imagine a society, no matter how ideal in other respects, where word and gesture could never be counted upon. Questions asked, answers given, information exchanged - all would be worthless" (p. 19).

Augustine and Kant's absolutist deontological approach through insisting that it would never be okay to tell a lie, has not met with widespread approval since. Most philosophers and ethicists studied believed there were at least some circumstances where it would be justified to tell a lie. The exceptions offered were usually of a fairly important nature though, where lives hung in the balance, or of a social politeness nature where the person being lied to wouldn't really appreciate the truth. As it relates to the purpose of this paper's focus of analysis, none suggested that it would be acceptable to construct false arguments to support one's position in an academic debate.

#### *When Would Lying Be Acceptable?*

*When the Ends Justify the Means.* Ironically, the notion that truth is an attainable end could perhaps justify utilizing lies that ultimately advance that desirable end truth. This utilitarian approach to truth telling is oft cited by those, such as Quintilian, who was quite committed to the virtue of orators. Yet Golden, Bergquist, and Coleman (1984), explained, "Quintilian points out that the end, rather than the means is the leading principle of life. Any methods which the orator might use are acceptable if the cause which he defends is just" (p. 60). They continued, by listing

specific lies which Quintilian believed served a more important end than truth, including thwarting an assassin; to deceive an enemy in order to save a country; to hide righteous acts from an unjust judge; to forgive an enemy to the state's advantage; or to comfort a sick child (p. 60).

*When the Party Lied To Does Not Deserve the Truth.* Others have suggested that perhaps it is acceptable to lie to those that have no right to the truth. The oft-cited example from World War II was the scenario where Nazi storm troopers at the door were asking for the location of Jews hiding within, who were trying to avoid their own genocide at the hands of the Germans. Most claimed that in this extreme a case it would be morally acceptable to lie, to advance the greater good. Kant would disagree, arguing that once one lied, he or she would then become solely responsible for all following outcomes, everything from that point forward that could possibly be linked back to the lie. For example, the well intended lie may have unforeseen pejorative consequences. He would argue that by remaining true to a pure means of telling the truth the blame and responsibility would rest entirely with the true perpetrators of the evil being visited upon others. God would hold them responsible. Most of those objecting to Kant's extreme absolutist deontological stance would rather at least try to save the victim from the evil, perhaps suspecting God would forgive them the lie.

*When One has Mental Reservations.* This loophole is discussed by St Thomas Aquinas who went to great effort to analyze the work of St. Augustine on this topic, and noted some reservations of his own. He articulated three types of lies, the helpful lies, the jesting lies, and the malicious lies. It was only the third category that he considered to be a mortal sin. The others could be pardoned, or would at least be pardonable. The basis for a pardon was hotly contested though. Mental reservations or mental restraints became a popular basis for such an appeal. This basically meant that the statement in question was not really a lie if an unspoken mitigating element accompanied the claim. For example, one might say, "No, I did not steal that car" aloud, and mentally add, "so far as you could prove anyway."

*Casuistry.* Lieutenant Oliver North may have had something like these mental reservations in mind during the Iran Contra-gate hearings when he spoke of plausible deniability, and serving the higher duty. By lying to congress he cast himself in the role of telling the noble lie. Casuistry is the art of trying to justify through interpreting exceptions, or finding or creating loopholes, to universal rules, laws or the tyranny of principles. The objective was to allow an agent to take an action in a particular case that might normally run afoul of general interpretations of those moral absolutes, like lying. According to Jonsen and Toulmin (1988, p.2) this practice reached its peak in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, falling into disrepute in the mid seventeenth century

because of its widely perceived abuses. Clerics were typically the ones that were practicing casuistry.

Jonsen and Toulmin contended that the practice is increasing in society today, with particular emphasis in medical ethics. Since Jonsen is a medical ethicist that is an area about which he is well versed. In our postmodern society though this practice seems to be gaining favor far beyond the field of medical ethics. President Clinton may have been thinking along this line with his denial of having sexual relations with "that woman", based upon one particular meaning of the specific word "is" that was used in the question he was responding to. His legal training no doubt equipped him to look for equivocal language that would potentially allow him to side step the obvious intent of certain questions. This might have been the type of abuse that caused casuistry to fall into disrepute.

Time prevents this paper from exploring other philosophers' views on lying. Clearly though, there is a wide range of views, from the suggestion that lying is okay for a noble cause, to lying is never okay, to any lying imperils your very soul.

### **Case Exploration of Lying in Parliamentary Debate**

To better analyze the application of some of these concepts and more fully explore their nuances one should narrow the focus to a particular field of communication. Bok (1978), Campbell (2001), Komp (1998), Lewis & Saarni (1993), Nyberg (1993), and Sullivan (2001) all attempted to relate the generalized philosophical concepts of lying to our quotidian existence. They examined white lies told to keep from hurting others, lies told on resumes, lies told by physicians to keep from worrying their patient, etc. McGaffin & Knoll (1968) and Wise (1973) focused instead on the halls of power in American politics and government in the last third of the previous century, with emphasis on the government's interaction with the press. Ekman (1985) and many others looked to deception detection techniques, which though interesting to contemplate, will not be of great benefit to this particular analysis.

#### *Macroscopic Exploration: Debate Itself as a Lie*

Before delving too deeply into whether debate itself is the "big lie," it is first important to identify what academic or interscholastic debate is. Academic debate, whether it is being taught within the classroom or practiced between two or more schools at interscholastic competitions (tournaments), typically assigns teams to arbitrarily defend or attack a given resolution. The student competitors often have little or no choice in the topic to be debated, or the side they will represent, at least in the preliminary rounds of competition. In those forms of debate that adopt a



single resolution for the entire year, debaters typically participate in what is known as switch side debate. This means that during the preliminary rounds each debater will spend half of the debates attacking and half of the debates defending the same resolution, just switching sides from round to round, arguably insuring that they must defend the side they are not personally in favor of half the time. In parliamentary debate, the resolution typically changes each round, but again the debater has no guarantee that he or she will be able to defend his or her own convictions in any given debate.

Given the above, isn't debate itself just one big lie? Isn't it disingenuous to be discussing ethical debate, when the very foundational premise for the activity is dependent upon at least one team lying in most debates? After all, aren't debaters often asked to misrepresent their own views and convictions on the issues being debated depending on which side of the issue they have arbitrarily been assigned? Many beginning debate students struggle with this same dilemma. The author teaches at a values-based university closely affiliated with a major denominational religious association. Most of the students enrolled in the argumentation and debate class have been trained and taught to believe that it is a sin to lie, which is prohibited by God through the Ten Commandments. Some ask how they can be expected to defend the death penalty, abortion, or for that matter The Three Stooges if they really oppose them, or vice versa. This is a critically important question that will be answered in the third section.

#### *Microscopic Exploration: Lying within Arguments*

Assuming one gets past the macroscopic issue of debate as a lie, one must then look to the microscopic level of whether it is morally defensible to lie within the construction of the debate arguments themselves. A debate consists of many different arguments and counterarguments on a particular resolution all within a limited span of time. An argument is generally accepted as consisting of a claim or conclusion, explained by a warrant or reason, supported by evidence or data (presented in Toulmin, 1964, p. 97-98). It is not reasonable to expect that student debaters can be highly experienced subject matter experts that can speak from authority on all the issues they must debate. So they must instead represent the claims, warrants and evidence from others who do have this expertise. In some forms of debate, the debaters can read from prepared notes, briefs, or evidence cards citing their source and quoting their source's actual words taken from other published material. These quotations can be used to verify and support the debaters' claims within the debate, in much the same manner as students may utilize research quotations within a term paper to support their claims. These quotations often become the proof for the arguments

In parliamentary debate, the practice of actually reading from these prepared notes has been disallowed to encourage a more personable and audience focused delivery style, which some felt had been diminished in other forms of interscholastic debate that rewarded rapid delivery to allow more pre-scripted arguments to be issued within the limited time parameters. Parliamentary debaters are still expected to make sound arguments that consist of more than just competing claims, but they must rely on their memory and to some degree that of their critic or judge to provide or verify the support for their warrants and evidence.

There might be a temptation for the debaters in either debate format to make up data or information that could support their claims and provide them a convincing edge in a close debate. This falsification of evidence would be lying of the worst form, willfully and intentionally misrepresenting known facts or creating false assurances where no such assurances should be made. If believed, the lying debaters would obviously gain an advantage over opponents that restricted themselves to fairly representing the truth, as they knew it.

The third section of this paper will reject the defense of this microscopic form of lying to advance one's arguments within a round. Such liars might reason, if it is justifiable to make an overall claim favoring or opposing the resolution that may not be consistent with the speaker's true convictions, why would it be any different to make up lies in the substrata of the arguments. After all, a lie is a lie is a lie. Or is it?

#### *Macroscopic Analysis: Debate Is Not a Lie*

While at first glance, an activity that asks participants to make statements that they do not necessarily believe might sound like a lie or at least unethical. In the case of debate that is not true. This is an issue that was probably last hotly contested by the debate community around the time of McCarthyism. The controversy even captured the attention of the *New York Times* (Burns, 1954, p.24.). The national debate topic for intercollegiate debate in 1954 dealt with granting U.S. recognition to the People's Republic of China. Since switch-side debating had recently been imposed, that meant that all teams would have to advocate this policy for half of their rounds. Hicks and Greene (1999) provided a terrific summary of those concerns, both principled and pragmatic, shared by many at the time. They pointed out that a number of colleges (most notably the military academies) decided not to participate in debate for that year rather than be forced into such an advocacy (p. 1).

Hicks and Green further explained that a paradigm shift was being undertaken, which changed the view of debate from a model of

"public advocacy" to that of "a method of inquiry" for using debate as a critical thinking tool (p. 2). They then cited a survey conducted by Donald Klopf and James McCrosky (1964) that concluded that 95% of the coaches viewed switch-side debating as ethical (p. 3). There has been little if any interest in this question since that time. The issue had been settled. The community seemed nearly unanimous that this practice of debating pre-assigned roles, not necessarily consistent with one's own private convictions, was completely ethical. To better understand why it was not a lie it will be helpful to consider two somewhat related arenas, game playing and other role-playing environments in the entertainment field.

In a Kantian vein, some debate coaches and instructors, though not many, profess that it is possible to advise debaters to never make claims that they do not personally support. Although it would be extremely difficult, it is conceivable that more advanced students could find ways to redirect the focus of the debate away from the area of agreement towards other's issues, rather than directly counter one's own beliefs. For example one might admit the opposing idea is good in principle, but would be impossible to institute, therefore focusing the debate on the means of implementation rather than the philosophical mandate of the other team's advocacy. Another alternative would be to have the Negative or Opposition team counterplan with even more sweeping reforms than the Affirmative or Government team recommended, arguing that taking the first action would be inadequate and might even mask the problem preventing necessary drastic reform. This concept might be thought of as trying to avoid Band-Aid surgery, which is merely applying a Band-Aid when the patient really requires surgery.

#### *Mental Reservations or Casuistry*

The activity of debate is not a lie even though students frequently make resolutionally assigned claims that they may not believe. Remember, for this paper, at a definitional level a false statement must be made with the intent to deceive to be considered a lie. A comedian telling a joke about a talking horse that goes into a bar, orders a drink and is asked by the bartender, "Hey buddy, why the long face?" is not lying. He is not intending to deceive people into believing that horses can really talk, or that bars really serve animals alcohol. He is simply telling a joke. Swift, in writing "A Modest Proposal" was merely using satire and irony to make a bigger point. He was not actually imploring the world to eat Irish babies. Different types of communication in different settings have different rules and expectations. These unique expectations inherent within the activity of debate bear on the question of whether the activity itself is a lie. Examining the following two rhetorical exigencies of debate may help to clarify why the activity in not being deceitful is the macroscopic sense.

## The Game of Debate: A Role Playing Environment

This paper argues that a lie is an attempt to willfully misrepresent the truth with the intent of deceiving another. The overall activity of debate is not a lie therefore because there is no attempt to misrepresent the facts to those within the debate, at least as an intrinsic requirement of the activity itself. The potential practice of lying within the debate will be examined later in this paper. The reason no attempt at misleading anyone is occurring at the macroscopic level though, is that debate takes place in a special role-playing environment where all parties are aware that the sides for the debate were arbitrarily assigned and all parties realize that the debaters are advancing views not necessarily consistent with their own personally held convictions. Similarly, all recognize that the judges' decisions are not a reflection of their own conviction on the issue, but of the merit of the arguments offered in the debates.

### *Gaming*

At one level debate is simply a game, a role playing game with certain objectives to be strived for within the parameters of that game. In the game of Monopoly for example, players are not really field artillery pieces, or racecars, they are merely represented by those tokens. Nor would a player of the game of monopoly really bankrupt their parents, kids, or friends, as they can and should do within the game in order to win. Likewise, Chess is only a simulated war game not an actual campaign to kill your opponent. Tradition even suggested that Chess became a means whereby leaders resolved differences without having to resort to war. In the game of Risk you are merely playing a strategy and engaging in an odds weighing game, not truly attempting world domination. The point should be clear by now, but can be seen in virtually any other board game, or video game as well. There are even some games such as the *Liar's Club* or *I Doubt It* that encourage or even require lying as an intrinsic part of the game. To lie is expected and accepted in such a gaming environment.

Everyone understands that the player, or in this case the debater, is simply assuming a particular role for the duration of that round. Just as world domination might be the objective in Risk, or a massing the most wealth might be the goal in Monopoly, convincing a neutral third party judge that you advanced the strongest arguments on your pre-assigned ground is your objective in the game of debate. However, it will be argued that one must still follow rules within this game environment. Just as one cannot steal from the bank in Monopoly, surreptitiously remove an enemy's army pieces in Risk, or move out of turn in Chess, one cannot and should not misrepresent facts in debate.

### *Entertainment Media*

Another way to realize that debate itself is not a lie is to focus on other activities relying upon role-playing elements. Think of participants in other role-playing environments besides games. The field of entertainment is ripe with comparisons. Theater, opera, television and the movies provide terrific examples of other activities where actors are assigned roles to play within a particular time frame and setting. As viewers, we know that they are merely actors on a stage. We don't believe for a moment that the actor that portrays Superman can really fly, but we momentarily suspend our disbelief in order to enjoy his portrayal within this fictional "reality". We are only being lied to if we are not privy to the charade.

It is also entirely possible that one can still cheat or "lie" within these other role-playing activities, just as one can still lie or cheat in debate. When Orson Wells staged his radio drama of H. G. Wells' "War of the Worlds", one can argue that a lie was perpetrated on parts of the American public, since many didn't realize that it was merely a radio drama being enacted. Some programs, such as the old *Candid Camera* television shows with Alan and Peter Funt, or the more current variations such as *The Jamie Kennedy Experiment*, crossed the line by not revealing up front that practical jokes were being played on the guests for the amusement of the audience. That would have ruined the joke of course. But, one could fairly argue that such dishonesty or deception were heavily present in these shows and thus constituted lies to the victims though perhaps not to the audience.

No one felt, though, that they were being lied to by the Wizard of Oz movie, or book either for that matter, even though we don't really believe in dancing tin men, flying monkey's or talking scarecrows. When we watch a play, movie, or television show we expect to be entertained and creatively ushered into an alternate reality. Written fiction carries with it the same understanding that reality is being suspended for a particular time and purpose. To believe then that the activity of debate as a whole is a lie, one must also believe that all movies, T.V. shows, plays, books, or for that matter even telling a joke, singing a song or interpreting or even writing literature are performative lies as well. To take it a step further, any sort of photographic representation could be called a lie since it is really just an image standing for something other than what it really is. After all, television sets don't really have little people running around in them. Viewers recognize this, just as academic debate viewers recognize that the debaters do not necessarily believe what they profess or advocate in the confines of the round. That expectation is foreign to the activity, at least to those that are not just beginning the activity. Following that line of reasoning to its logical extent one could claim that all forms of

signification and signs are lies because they represent something other than themselves. Could one technically interpret the word "lie" in such a way? Certainly. Would the word then have lost its primary descriptive value? No doubt.

### **The Purpose of Debate**

While debate, as described above is a game, it is also much more than just a game. It is an important teaching tool. Students learn to research, to construct valid arguments, to think quickly upon their feet, to deliver convincing arguments, and to assess one's target audience and adapt to that audience. It is also a tool that can be used to teach students how to discern lies, fallacies and poorly supported claims issued by those that would run for public office, sell them unnecessary goods or services, or attempt to detrimentally influence them in other ways.

#### *The Importance of Debate in Education*

One of the primary goals of higher education is to teach critical thinking skills. No activity accomplishes this better than does debate. Allen, Berkowitz, Hunt, & Loudon (1999) conducted a meta-analysis to determine the success of debate training, forensics, and communication education on student's critical thinking ability. The meta-analysis found "a large substantial positive influence of public communication training relating to critical thinking" (p. 28). They added, "The findings illustrate that participation in public communication skill building exercises consistently improved critical thinking. Participation in forensics demonstrated the largest improvement in critical thinking scores whether considering longitudinal or cross-sectional design" (p. 28).

The reason for such dramatic findings in improved critical thinking skills from debate is that the activity stresses that each participant should analytically weigh each statement being made both by the participant and the opponent. One strives to make well-reasoned arguments and to spot fallacies or poorly reasoned positions within an opponent's arguments. Many of these benefits are directly attributable to the counterattitudinal advocacy training intrinsic to debate. By defending a position counter to one's own conviction, one learns the strengths and weaknesses of the Opposition's arguments.

This is helpful for several reasons. First, by knowing both sets of arguments, that debater is then better able to attack this position when on the other side in future debates, and better able to defend one's original position. But the best benefit is that they actually learn to listen to what others are saying and to understand why, rather than automatically

parroted standard positions and rejecting claims counter to their own views without even considering their warrants or support data. The truth is that there is a lot more gray than black and white in the world, and by seriously listening to other's views one can be better equipped to reason logically to stronger conclusions. This brings the discussion full circle back to Socrates and Plato's efforts to seek truth. Aristotle believed that truth was best served by vigorously comparing opposing positions. The stronger position was presumed to be the most truthful.

### **Microscopic Analysis: Debaters Can and Do Lie within Debates**

#### *Motivation for Lying in Debate*

Not to put too fine a point on it, but a primary motivation to lie in debates is to win the debate. Many debate rounds are extremely close and rise or fall on arguments that can be enhanced with strong, falsified claims supporting the debater's position. Once rewarded in such a manner it becomes increasingly easy for the debater to cut such ethical corners again in the future. If successful, such a tactic might start spreading to others with low ethical standards.

#### *Need for Statistical Research*

Not much statistical research is available for current practices of deceitful communication in intercollegiate debate rounds. There is a need for further research to be conducted in this area.

Clark (1996) administered an extensive survey concerning ethics in high school forensics in the state of Florida in 1995 and determined that fabricating (making up) evidence in debate and extemporaneous speaking was a significant problem. She reported "Seventy-four percent of respondents identified that this practice happens "often" or sometimes." Eighty-nine percent recorded that they consider this a "very serious" or "somewhat serious" ethical violation" (p. 73). Looking between the lines of this research causes one to wonder how 11 percent of the respondents could think that such a practice would not be at least "somewhat serious" as an ethical violation.

#### *Anecdotal Proof of Lying*

In the absence of statistical data one must unfortunately rely on anecdotal evidence. Regarding parliamentary debate, the author has heard from many, many students and many other coaches that they have seen, caught, heard about many examples of in round lying, or witnessed other students blatantly bragging and laughing about lying in debate rounds over the past few years. Absent statistical support, it would be unfair to hazard

a guess as to the propensity of the lying in debates, but suffice it to say that any occurrences are too many.

This deception is not unique to parliamentary debate. Formats of debate that allow debaters to read evidence briefs in rounds also have experienced fabricated evidence. The difference is that students in those formats of debate will frequently keep these pieces of fabricated evidence in their files. This means that other teams can call for the evidence after the round to compare it with photocopies of the original articles, for example, in an effort to expose the fabrication. Another difference is that these debaters know that they must provide a full and complete source citation so that the other team can research the source if desired. Not only does one gain a heuristic benefit of building upon previous research bases, but also this provides a check on abuse. The formats of intercollegiate debate that allow evidence to be read into debate rounds have traditionally been particularly harsh with ethical violations such as falsifying evidence, when those breaches are exposed.

#### *Dangers of Lying in Parliamentary Debate*

The dangers of allowing such lying to go unchecked in parliamentary debate are numerous and pervasive. Just as strong interpersonal relationships between friends, groups, or couples, rely on trust and honest communication, so too does academic debate. Absent that foundation the activity could collapse.

*Fairness Denied.* Games have rules to help insure fairness. An equal playing field insures that each participant has a legitimate chance to prevail. In debate, resolutions attempt to fairly divide argumentative ground between sides. But all this presupposes the debaters are speaking truthfully and advancing valid arguments. Should one side lie, they potentially gain an unfair advantage over those that refuse to lie, trumping their every legitimate claim with a counterclaim that overshadows it. Competitions where participants have unequal resources stop being as competitive, which could spell extreme danger for the game as a whole.

*Truth Obscured.* If a purpose of debate is to promote it as an investigative tool for discovering truth, allowing lies completely subverts this aim. Debate then becomes the worst form of sophistry, all form and no substance, or mere puffery as Plato or Socrates might say. *Education Thwarted.* The educational aims of the activity would also be destroyed. Why would one actually need to keep up on current events or read the classics in political science or philosophy if all they had to do was to claim something to be true then hope that the judge did not know enough to disregard the claim. Should false representations become the norm, students also run the danger of disadvantaging their education. It is



probably better that one not engage in the activity if they are only subjected to false claims of reality. An example comes to mind of the myth in certain African tribes and villages that mating with young virgin girls can cure a male's HIV. Such ignorance and false claims can be dangerous for society.

*Character Destroyed.* The worst danger of lying in debate is that students might get away with it. Accordingly, students might be conditioned to resort to dishonesty to accomplish their other goals, both in school and outside the educational system. One of the highest benefits of debate is that it helps to encourage students to seek truth through the critical examination of dialectical claims. If instead they learn that one need not care about truth at all but just learn how best to package deceit to make it more attractive, a grave disservice is being done both on those students and on society as a whole. Bok (1978) suggested that the deceived person too, could be hurt. "A lie, in Hartman's words, "injures the deceived person in his life: it leads him astray" (p.20). Regardless of whether one is attracted to lying because one has previously profited from the practice, or if one is drawn to the practice because they have been victimized by it, the wrong skills are being taught. Society has enough problems already with dishonesty without adding more liars to the mix.

Improving ethics in business and the law have been given much lip service for the last several decades in graduate and undergraduate schools. Yet the problem of lying to get ahead persists. Schofield (2001) reported a scandal uncovered at the University of Toronto where many of the law students seeking summer internships were falsely reporting straight "A"s, this despite the fact that internships were plentiful. Oakley and Lynch (2000) conducted a study of 700 business people that found promise keeping was their lowest workplace value. Less than one third kept their promises. "Of those respondents who expressly were told that the promise was legally enforceable, the number who stated that they would keep their promise increased to 57%" (p.377). Just barely over a half of the respondents felt they would keep a promise even if the law required it. That is a very sad statement on the state of business. Hopefully, ethical encouragement within the forensics environment may help to establish a culture within our environment that rejects such ethical shortcuts.

*Eludes Easy Detection and Rule Enforcement.* The unique danger of lying in Parliamentary debate is that there is no quick and easy check to stop the abuse. The activity must in a sense rely on the presumptive honesty of the debaters. Parliamentary debate does not allow students to read within rounds from printed briefs or reports so there are no files to inspect if challenged afterwards. In parliamentary debate, one must be a bit more trusting in the integrity of the participants. This may

be a good thing since it is an environment more like what debaters will be entering after college. But the nature of the activity makes it that much more important that all operate due diligence to protect the activity from lying.

### **Recommendations to Avoid Abuses of Lying in Debate**

Lying within parliamentary debate rounds appears to be a problem that is significant now, and has the potential to grow worse given the current lack of solid checks and balances of the abuse coupled with the potential benefits of successfully lying. The dangers are potentially monumental, perhaps leading to destruction of the event in its current form. If this threat is to be combated, some concrete steps should be taken.

#### *Add Ethical Statements to Professional Associations*

Bok (1978) suggested that one of the problems with lying is that teachers and other professionals sometimes ignore memorializing an ethical statement regarding the practice. "This absence of real analysis is reflected also in teaching and in codes of professional ethics. As a result, those who confront difficult moral choices between truthfulness and deception often make up their own rules. They think up their own excuses and evaluate their own arguments" (p. 12). The National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA) and other associations that have not already done so should adopt an ethical statement condemning lying, in clear precise language that empower debate judges to base decisions on this issue alone. Judges could currently do so but many may not know this. Statutory authority may provide teeth to the regulation. Merely referencing the American Forensics Association's ethical statement may not go far enough since it does not specifically address the nuances of parliamentary debate.

#### *Train Students in Ethical Expectations for the Activity*

There are ways to help train student's expectations of honesty in debate rounds. Instructors should select textbooks that stress ethics in the practice of debate. They should establish ethical parameters in lectures, and for programs that compete interscholastically, at team meetings. Encourage a culture that values honesty and integrity above winning trophies, not both are mutually exclusive. Coaches should help foster a no tolerance for lying environment. This is an issue that can and should be incorporated at summer debate workshops and institutes.

Students are on the front lines in debate tournaments, and the

ones that often know whether lying is taking place and to what degree it is occurring. Students seldom admit to other coaches and judges that they do so well because they lie effectively. Yet, they often do make such admissions to other students. If the students tolerate it and look the other way, soon they will realize that others profit from this practice unfairly. They may feel pressure to comply with or even emulate that practice, especially if it is perceived that others are lying or cheating. We may see a similar parallel in individual events with students citing false sources in extemp.

When students reject the practice by not laughing as others regale them in tales of successful lying, by confronting opponents that continually misrepresent the truth in rounds, by discussing this proclivity with teammates and coaches, and ultimately informing the liars' coach (though perhaps this should be done at a coach to coach level), ultimately the practice of lying will diminish. Peer pressure can be a powerful tool of conditioning. If the community does not forcefully reject the practice, it will become an accepted practice. But if the students send a message of zero tolerance for lying, the practice can be abated. One's competitive drive to win is not the sole motivating factor for debaters. Enhancing social ties, friendships, and peer acceptance are equally or more important motivators for why students enter or stay with the activity. If debaters feel their peers may accept lie as an effective means to an end they maybe tempted to lie themselves. If they realize that their peers reject this practice and look down on those who lie, they will hopefully be less likely to lie themselves.

Students must also be taught to avoid casuistry or equivocal language in couching their statements. They should not be trying to see how close they could come to being deceptive without really "telling a lie." If a debater is not certain of a fact, do not pretend to be. In *Uses of Argument*, Toulmin (1964) provides a layout of argument that includes what he calls a modal qualifier. This provides debaters with a gauge of certainty about claims. To abuse this by claiming a greater degree of certainty about certain claims or facts is a form of lying. The speaker's ethos is enhanced when this tool is properly used, and diminished when it is abused. Judges know how fragile memories can be. If one cannot remember for certain where she heard something, she should indicate that rather than falsify evidence or cite a source of impressive sounding credibility.

#### *Train Judges to Demand Honest Communication*

Judges should also be trained to be vigilant for repeated cases of misrepresentation by the same debaters, or sometimes debaters from the same programs, which might have created a culture that encourages or tolerates lying as a practice. Should a tendency or trend be spotted, judges

should confront the debaters in a polite manner informing them that a number of previous misrepresentations have been detected and that the debaters should be very careful not to allow further misrepresentations. Judges should also remember that it is very possible to mistakenly pass on bad information or claims, which absent an intent to mislead should not be considered lying. This does not negate the importance of still correcting previous misstatements as an educational priority. Should the debaters persist in this practice of lying to win, bringing it to the debater's coach would be advisable. That coach will want to know so that corrective actions can be instituted. Coaches and judges should also be prepared to base a debate's decision on the veracity of the debater's claim.

Likewise, coaches need to be ever vigilant that their own debaters are not lying to advance in rounds. Most coaches realize that a program's reputation can be irreparably damaged because of the dishonest practices of just a few bad apples. But coaches also realize that mistakes constantly occur in debates. When debaters recognize, either through their own efforts or the through the help of another, that they have issued misstatements in a previous round, they should make every effort to track down the team they debated and the critic that listened to the round and apologize for passing on the incorrect information. This likely will not be known until the team returns home from the tournament and has an opportunity to check their facts. It seems that such a stance would help to bolster one's credibility for future rounds, rather than diminish it.

Finally, there are other avenues for judge training such as providing training sessions at tournaments, encouraging such discussions at professional or developmental conferences and conventions, and ultimately preparing journal articles for coaches and students alike to review. The problem will never completely disappear, but by sending a strong message of rejection the community can take a decisive stand against the insidious practice of dishonest communication.

### **Conclusion**

The activity of debate is in itself not a lie because no one is attempting to deceive or mislead anyone. All statements being made are within the context of a very specific role-playing game environment. Through incorporating counter attitudinal advocacy, debate is an important ethical tool of instruction that teaches eloquent delivery, but more importantly teaches strong critical thinking skills. The benefits of this activity though may soon be imperiled, at least in parliamentary debate, by those that insist on lying their way to cheap victories. Steps can and should be taken to help promote a culture of integrity and honesty that will not accept such ethical corner cutting. To effectively combat this problem will require the combined effort of the governing associations and rule

making bodies, diligent oversight by critics, and the commitment of students and coaches with integrity and the courage to stand up for guiding their activity in a positive direction.

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