

Is Saul Right That Lying Is No Worse than Misleading?

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Abstract: In the moral philosophy field, whether lying is not inferior to misleading remains a highly contested topic. However, current studies in the moral studies field have not applied the deliberative approach and evaluative approach to analyze whether lying is preferable than misleading. Typical philosophers like Jennifer Saul argue that lying is no worse than misleading. This paper, nonetheless, will critically examine her theory by applying the deliberative approach and evaluative approach since no previous study has done so, and by conducting ethical justification according to the essence of lying and misleading. Meanwhile, this paper will address that successful lying is not inferior to merely intentional misleading, while misleading is superior to lying in exceptional situations, and that lying is inferior to mere attempted misleading, and successful lying is morally inferior to intended misleading.

Keywords: lying, misleading, evaluative approach, ethical justification, commitment

1. Introduction

Preference for lying or misleading is ambiguous since it means choosing one category of deception instead of the other [1]. Saul's argument for ethical preference can be criticized when the intention and consequence of lying or misleading are identical. This paper is going to demonstrate there is not supposed to be moral preference. More precisely, *ceteris paribus* (holding all other factors unchanged), mere misleading is not ethically superior to lying, and successful lying is not ethically inferior to purely deliberate misleading.

In philosophical debates wherein debaters must decide whether to mislead or lie, philosophers argue for a general answer. There is a popular and conventional argument that actions of lying are inherently inferior to that of purely misleading [1]. Based on this perspective, when faced with the choice of lying or misleading, individuals should always choose the latter, except in certain circumstances. Some philosophical theorists, on the other hand, provided that there is no morally relevant variance between lying and misleading. From the viewpoint of this assessment, then, the current paper does not think the choice between misleading and lying is important from an ethical point of view, except in exceptional circumstances. Lying, in some situations, is superior to misleading, but in other situations lying is inferior to misleading, and in some cases, there is a lack of an ethical difference between lying and misleading [2].

2. Ethically Misleading and Lying

Saul provides that lying, in most cases, is ethically superior to misleading [3]. Nonetheless, the viewpoint of this paper conflicts with the argument in her paper. This is because both are means of deception, since the purpose of lying and misleading is usually to deceive the subject being deceived, and in this respect, the chosen means of deception is immaterial from the perspective of morality [4]. Considering lying and misleading from a moral perspective, then Saul fails to take into account some points that have nothing to do with morality, namely these two forms of deception. In lying, contrary to what she says is generally the morally better course of action. The choice to lie brings with it a commitment to what one believes to be false, while in misleading this commitment can be avoided. Given this difference, it can be argued that lying, in some situations, can be worse than misleading. The traditional philosophical position on the tendency to mislead versus lie can be considered false, since the variance in commitment can be used to argue why lying is superior to misleading [2]. Differences in commitment are sometimes irrelevant in moral evaluation. If so, lying and misleading will be ethically the same.

3. Misleading and Lying in Exceptional Circumstances

Notably, misleading can be ethically superior to lying both from an evaluative perspective and a deliberate point of view. This section will prove that misleading, in exceptional circumstances, is ethically superior to lying, by proving that misleading, in special situations, is better than lying from both evaluative approach and deliberate approach in the first scenario, and by conducting ethical justification according to the essence of lying and misleading in the second scenario.

3.1. When Nurse Lied

There is a volume of reasons why individuals lie or mislead, in accordance with their ethical judgement of the prevailing situation. To better understand Saul's argument that lying is not inferior to misleading, this paper is going to take a scenario as the first example, in which a dying woman attempts to seek information regarding her daughter from a nurse in a hospital. The nurse saw that she was fine yesterday. Nonetheless, her daughter was later killed. In this case, the nurse's answer can be divided into two following versions:

The first version: She is well.

The second version: I came across with her on the previous day, and I saw that she was well.

In both answers, this nurse wants to state her daughter was fine. Nonetheless, the nurse deliberately lies in the first answer, while in the second answer, this nurse misleads without lying because this nurse came across with her daughter yesterday, and that her daughter was fine. When discussing ethical issues, most would argue that it would be worse ethically for a nurse to provide untrue information about her daughter's health with the first version of the answer than to try to mislead with the second [2]. Even Saul who does not consider the second answer to be better than the first one admitted this intuition.

The choice between these two versions for the nurse can be argued from different views. The argument can be made in terms of questions the communicator is asked and what to do in the situation, as well as in terms of the deliberations that assess the reasons for opposing and supporting a possible plan. Alternatively, individuals can view the scenario from an evaluative point of view or as an outside spectator. Using these two viewpoints can bring diverse consequences, because what is better from an evaluation point of view is not necessarily better from a deliberation point of view, and vice versa

[5]. In this respect, however, misleading is preferable to lying, both from an evaluative and a deliberative point of view.

3.2. When Susan Lied

When evaluating various categories of viewpoints on lying and misleading, the question arises of ethical justification according to the essence of lying or misleading, which favors one vice over another. In doing so, it brackets both the moral reasons for dependency, such as the promise not to lie or mislead on any occasion, and the non-moral motivations for dependency, including the ease of sustaining a lie as opposed to coming up with a misleading story [2]. Meanwhile, the ethical variance between lying and misleading seems to be rooted in the fact that one is an attempt to mislead, while the other is a lie [5].

In the second scenario, for instance, Susan went to a gallery exhibition, and she started talking to William, who asked her if she liked the paintings. Susan thought the brushwork was good and the mastery of composition was wonderful, but overall, she did not like the paintings. Susan was not sure if William, who drew the pieces on display, wanted a real answer. Susan did not say that she liked the paintings, but that they were well-stroked and well-composed. Susan's motivation was to state that she liked the works, but she lied in the first answer and tried to mislead in the second. In this case, it was worse for Susan to lie to William than to mislead him. This scenario incorporates the idea that lying is inferior to misleading.

In the two scenarios that have been mentioned above in this paper, for instance, there are different intuitions that arise. To begin with, the intuitions developed a conflict with the point suggested by Saul that there lacks an ethical distinction between lying and misleading, except in extraordinary cases [3]. In these scenarios, there is an intuitive ethical difference between lying and misleading, and therefore does not seem to satisfy the different situations in which Saul says there is an ethical variance and therefore, such cases must be placed in a legal context [4]. If these examples are seen as a parallel to the legal framework, then there will be many scenarios with similar legal frameworks, meaning that these cases where there is an ethical difference between lying and misleading are not as closely salient as Saul suggests [6].

4. Commitment Made in Lying

Moreover, the intuitions that arise in these exceptional examples conflict with the typical standpoint that lying is usually worse than misleading. Advocates of this standpoint fail to clarify the exceptional circumstances where lying is inferior to misleading. Intuition in this respect, seems to favor the view that lying and misleading are not always ethically equal. Saul argues vehemently that there is no moral variance between lying and misleading in the same way. In this section, this article will answer the line of discussion proposed by Saul by pointing out a previously overlooked difference, namely that misleaders avoid promising false things promised by liars. According to Saul, whether by misleading or lying, the speakers expressed what they believed to be wrong. The difference is that this communication includes whether the speaker is trying to convey the false belief by other means, or whether she states something she believes to be false [5]. According to Saul's insinuation, the difference between lying and misleading is simply the difference between means of achieving a common goal, such as using two different brands of firearms to kill people. Saul abandons the suggestion that there is a morally relevant difference between misleading and lying, arguing that misleading and lying are not as different as suggested. Saul argues that lying involves a breach of faith, whereas misleading avoids this. In addition, she argues that the difference between lying and misleading cannot be morally relevant when the subject who is misled is partially responsible for the deception as opposed to lying [6]. While Saul insists that lying and misleading differ only in what is

said, this paper argues that she fails to recognize the problem of commitment. In lying, commitment is to pass on a proposition they believe to be false, while in misleading the intention is to pass on a proposition that is untrue but to which the misleader is not committed [3]. By committing to a proposition, then debaters commit to defending that proposition when challenged.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Saul's argument that lying is no worse than misleading is morally correct since the mere act of misleading is not morally superior to the act of lying. Lying and misleading are both means of deceiving the subject, and in this respect, the deception chosen is not material from an ethical point of view. In special circumstances, it is sometimes better to mislead than to lie, and lying is morally worse than simply attempting to mislead, and lying successfully is morally worse than deliberately misleading. Lying involves a breach of belief because the assumptions conveyed are considered untrue, and in misleading the misleader attempts to convey a false belief. When lying, a commitment is made to something the liar believes to be untrue, while in misleading a commitment is avoided. Thus, when lying, individuals undertake to justify their actions and statements, while avoiding the same practice when misleading. Therefore, considering an ethical point of view, lying is no worse than misleading.

Therefore, when it comes to the situation wherein individuals must choose whether to lie or mislead, individuals need to choose to mislead if this situation is exceptional, while individuals may choose both lie or mislead if this situation is not exceptional, since there is no distinct ethical variance between lying and misleading, and that lying is not inferior to misleading from a moral perspective.

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