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Christian-Traditional insights on lying

The deficient categorization in the debate on lying and a
refreshing view on lying itself

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Summary

In this thesis I show that the current debate regarding lying is broadly categorized into two groups, namely Deontology and Utilitarianism. I do not use these terms to stereotype the debate but the lines of reasoning from both are easily recognizable when answering the question if lying is permissible. I argue that from a possible third perspective there are valuable insights available that in my opinion has been overlooked because mostly this perspective is categorized under the group of Deontology. I describe this group as Christian-Traditional. Although the association is reminiscent of a theological approach, I would like, on the contrary, to show three valuable insights from a philosophical approach that are a valuable addition to the debate. Firstly, I show the value of stating that uttering a lie also makes you a liar. Secondly, I argue that truthfulness and honesty are in practice more important moral categories than lying. And thirdly, I argue that in complex cases involving lying, such as the case of the Nazi at the door, there may be no right answers to the question of whether one should lie in such a situation. In themselves, I think they are three valuable insights, but these three elements together also show that categorizing the debate differently yields valuable insights that may have been overlooked because of the current categorization.

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Introduction

Lying is an act that many people dislike when others do it. Yet there are many who make use of the lie. After all, one can think of numerous situations when it is convenient for many to lie. Although there is no clear line from the many different studies on exactly how often people lie, we can at least say that it happens more often than we think of ourselves that we do it. Often even several times a day. Even though it may seem that many of these lies do no harm, I would venture to say that they probably do no good either. Well, it turns out that there is a lot to say on lying, and that is just said with the intention to announce that lying is the subject of this thesis. Now there are mainly two questions that are important when we talk about lying. It might be good to say that these questions are not questions I want to answer in this thesis; however, they are inevitable to deal with when we talk about lying. First of all, whether it is allowed to lie and if so, when? And second, what is the definition of lying? Later in part one of this thesis we will see, because there is not enough room for it in the introduction, that answering these questions is complicated, to say the least. Thereby we also will see that these questions are closely related because the answer to one question can influence the answer to the other question. One thing I would like to state here in the introduction, and which I will demonstrate more extensive in part one, is that the debate in answering the first question centers primarily around two ethical groups. These are Deontology in the line of Kant on the one hand and Utilitarianism on the other. This might look somewhat stereotypical, but what I really mean is that the reasoning for answering the question whether lying is permissible or not breaks down into these two variants. The way of reasoning from the deontological camp is that lying is wrong in itself. The utilitarian way of reasoning focusses on the consequences of the act of a lie. When I use these terms of Deontology and Utilitarianism, I do not mean all the positions defended by these camps, but rather a global categorization because the ways of reasoning are completely different.

Now it is understandable and obvious that the debate centers around these because this also largely covers the moral or immoral elements of actions. Yet, in my opinion, this concentration around deontological and utilitarian ways of reasoning does not do justice to the complex and important debate surrounding lying. My goal in this thesis is therefore to provide insights from another perspective. I would label this as Christian and Traditionalist and it focuses more on the (development of the) person himself and on how he should act but not just on a specific act in general. It is perhaps good to say here that this is not about Christianity as a religion. The arguments I am going to use to defend my thesis are therefore not theological arguments. But what is it then? I would say that it is about a certain way of looking at this world. Some elements of this are, for example, the individual actions of a human being with a clear separation between the good and the bad for a human being, and the greater whole on which you as a human being do not have an infinite influence. Your (im)moral actions are therefore also embedded in a certain context which means that in some contexts there might be no morally good option available to choose. Of course, these things are traceable to Christian religious teachings but as said that is not the basis for the arguments. That is where the term Traditional also comes in. Christian thought is in fact also strongly intertwined with traditional thinking in the line of Plato and Aristotle. Andreas Kinneging (2020) describes this combination with its associated worldview as 'The European Tradition'. And it is from this Christian-European-Traditional perspective that I want to highlight elements that can teach us something and enrich the current debate. My thesis therefore is:

A Christian-Traditional perspective that focusses on the actions of a person in a larger context has been overlooked in the debate on lying, however this perspective gives us insights into the nature of lying, teaches us how to act in general and show us the limits of our human capacity.

I will certainly not argue in this thesis that this then provides the only correct insights with regard to lying, nor is it feasible to show that one could see this as a full-fledged third pillar in the debate, but I do think that it provides us with insights that now, with the current categorization, are not or hardly appointed. I would even venture to say that these insights are under-reported. After all, they are not new insights. Ultimately, 'traditional' is not new either, but traditional insights can be valuable. It would be a shame if we no longer had these insights and I also think that, unfortunately, this is already the case.

Now for a brief overview of how this thesis is structured. First, in part one I try to outline the debate as briefly as possible to get an understanding of what answers there are to the two main questions as described above. This gives us an insight that the debate is therefore indeed centered around Deontology and Utilitarianism. These terms also deserve some definition so that it is clear to the reader what I am talking about when I use these terms. The same is also necessary of the terms Traditionalism and Christianity, thus I will provide my understanding of this sort of third pillar too. Finally, in this first part, I will also formulate a working definition of lying. Next, in part two of this thesis I will give three insights from this Christian-Traditional perspective and also describe what these insights can mean for the debate and can teach us. The three insights I give are as follows. The first insight from a Christian-Traditional perspective that I want to address is that the act of lying also makes you a liar. This may seem obvious, but it is hardly mentioned in the current debate. A second thing I want to address is the extreme focus in the debate on lying itself. A virtue I would describe as truthfulness or honesty is actually more important than just avoiding lying. Third and last, I want to address the fact that in the debate around lying, there is a lot of focus on exactly how to act in a certain situation. For example, the well-known case of a Nazi at the door is analyzed completely flat to see whether you may or may not lie in such a difficult situation and then it is argued that either lying or not lying is the good and morally correct choice. However, there is no attention paid to the fact that actually both choices might be not good. In my opinion, from a Christian-Traditional viewpoint, it is at best a first choice of two evils but never good. This shows something of the brokenness of the world and this insight I think we have also lost in today's debate and society. At the end, I will briefly pick out the main points of the debate and give some concluding remarks.

Part one: The current debate about lying

As already said in the introduction, in the debate on lying there are two questions that are important. In this section, I will map out the debate in relation to these two questions. In this way, it will become clear that the debate often revolves around two ethical positions. It will also make clear why the later additions from a Christian-Traditional perspective are a valuable addition to the debate.

1.1 Is it permitted to lie?

First of all, I would like to address the question: is it permitted to lie? In general, one would say that lying is not appreciated or tolerated. Of course, there are exceptions when a lie is appreciated in society. For example, it is socially desirable that one reacts positively to a new haircut of an acquaintance while not liking it yourself. Different 'lies' can be defined in this type of a socially desirable lie. I will come back to this in a moment when answering the second question about the definition of a lie. When we talk about lying in practice we usually mean 'bigger' lies. For example, you can think of lying when your partner asks you if you have cheated and then you deny that with the use of a lie. When we talk about these types of 'bigger' lies, we can say that in general people disapprove of lying. Now this question becomes really interesting when we are talking about extreme situations. The well-known example is of course from a Nazi at the door asking if you are hiding Jews in your house. Is it then permissible to lie if you are hiding Jews in your house? According to Alasdair Macintyre, the answers to these kinds of questions can roughly be categorized into two groups (1995, p. 315).¹ First of all a Utilitarian group. Of course, this is not about stereotyping either, but it indicates which reasoning is used to arrive at a certain decision. If we have to look in the utilitarian way of reasoning for a position that comes close to a general disapproval of lying, then it would be the so-called rule-utilitarianism.² In general this group states that lying is not good. It should therefore be distinguished from strict act-utilitarianism, which prescribes that every action should be examined to see whether it brings out the most good for the most people. Within this rule-utilitarian group, however, there is discussion about what justifies this general rule. After all, it is "nonsense to call the norm of truth telling a 'social convention,' if by that were meant that there might be a human society in which it were not generally adhered to" (Winch, 1972, pp. 62-63). In any case, for rule-utilitarianism, there are exceptions to this general rule that lying should be avoided. There is also much discussion about who or what determines what is an exception to the general rule. It would be going too far to go into this now, but in this discussion, there is not really one generally accepted answer. The case of the Nazi at the door, however, will always be included in such an exception.

Another group that does not have to deal with this difficulty, but who obviously have other things to contend with, is a group of people who argue that lying is never right, indeed a lie is wrong in itself. This Macintyre describes, and we will in the sequel also describe as Deontological or Kantian³, for it is the most well-known of this group. And here too it is important to note, it is not to stereotype, but this name shows how people in this group in general reason about the morality of actions. So here too it applies that this categorization does not mean that all points of view are represented therein. It is just a global categorization. To summarize what this group stands for it is best to let them speak for themselves. Kant

¹ Apart from Alasdair Macintyre and as I will describe later Bernard Williams, I am not aware of any more recent writers describing such a categorization. My analysis, however, is that the debate does take place within this categorization, but it is more zoomed in on details, on arguments within one of these two groups, and less about a general categorization or classification.

² For a good and comprehensive explanation of the distinction between rule- and act-utilitarianism see The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Stephan Nathanson, n.d.).

³ In section 2.3 I will describe the term and group of Absolutism. This is yet another form within the large categorization of Deontology that elaborates on certain elements thereof.

writes: “Without truth, social intercourse and conversation become valueless” (Ethik, p. 285). And Infield explains by saying:

And the offense of the liar, thus understood, is not a matter of the harmful consequences of particular lies. To tell a lie is wrong as such, just because it is a flouting of truth, and it is an offense primarily not against those particular others to whom this particular lie has been told, but against human rationality, everyone’s rationality, including the liar’s own rationality. By lying she or he has failed not only to acknowledge truth as a good that is indispensable in rational relationships with others, but also to recognize that a failure to respect truth is a failure in respecting oneself as a rational being. (Infield, 1980, p. 224)

So, in my own words, lying is wrong in itself and should not be allowed at all times. In this camp however there are many who prescribe certain actions related to lying as desirable while seeing a lie as an intrinsically bad thing. The consequence of this is that the definition of lying is adjusted so that certain actions fall within or outside the definition. This brings us almost to the second important question regarding lying but first something about what I mean with a Christian-Traditional view.

Very often, the Traditional and Christian views are also included in the second deontological group. Alasdair Macintyre writes that “there are trenchant restatements of this standpoint by St. Augustine, by St. Thomas Aquinas, by the Catechism of the Council of Trent, by Pascal, and by Protestant theologians both before and after Kant” (1995, p. 315). He cites for instance Augustine’s *Contra Mendacium* (31C): “it is said to God ‘Your law is truth.’ And for this reason, what is contrary to truth cannot be just. But who doubts that every lie is contrary to truth? Therefore no lie can be just.” (Augustine, 2010). Bernard Williams also includes writers such as Augustine and Aquinas among Deontology (Truth and Truthfulness, 2002, p. 77). In a way, they are right. After all, it is often the case that Traditional Christian thinkers had an absolute aversion to the lie. Yet I think that this categorization is too simple.⁴ There are for instance also writers who describe themselves as ‘Christian’ who seem to fit more into the category of Utilitarianism. For example, Cassian, Bonhoeffer, and Niebuhr would all, sometimes for different reasons that I will not go into here, accept lying if this could prevent a great evil (Tollefsen, 2014, p. 57). The categorization of Christian thinking around lying under Deontology is understandable though. In any case, these are reasons why I was triggered to show that there is more to it than just arguments categorizable into these two groups. I think that categorizations are good for mapping out a debate, so I will leave that aside. I do think however, that categorizing these two groups causes a loss of important insights in such a debate. As I expressed in my thesis, I think that in this categorization insights into the nature of lying are lost. In section two, therefore, I will offer different insights from a possible third perspective, which I will describe as Christian-Traditional. In the introduction, I have already largely discussed what I mean by this perspective. Summarized,

⁴ There are reasonable doubts about interpreting, for example, Augustine so strictly. This is what Erika T. Hermanowicz (2018) argues for in her article ‘Augustine on Lying’ that Augustine is often quoted on this point only from his *De mendacio* or *Contra Mendacium*, and this falls short because in other texts he makes less strict statements about this. From Augustine’s entire oeuvre, one can therefore say that he is less strict in this regard. Andreas Kinneging, in his book *De onzichtbare Maat; archeologie van goed en kwaad* [The Invisible Measure: Archeology of good and evil], also suggests that Augustine might come to other conclusions in tricky cases regarding lying (2020, p. 480). It would be going too far to go into every single detail here. For the precise arguments I would recommend reading Hermanowicz’s own article. Hermanowicz does state, however, that writers such as Gregory the Great, Peter Lombard, and Thomas Aquinas clearly describe a lie as strictly inadmissible.

it is a perspective that pays attention to symbolism, is expressive and yet also has a good eye for the context of a situation. But first of all it is important to look at what exactly we are talking about when we talk about a lie.

1.2 Definition of lying

So, the second question which is quite obvious in relation to lying but is important to try to give a certain answer to it is: what is the definition of lying? As is clear from the above, this second question has everything to do with the first question whether lying is permitted or not and therefore there are many definitions. The standard definition for a lie is as follows.

To lie =_{df} to make a believed-false statement to another person with the intention that the other person believe that statement to be true. (Mahon, 2015)

There are four 'conditions' recognizable in this definition. The first is that a statement must be made. The second is the untruthfulness condition which means that lying does not depend on the truth itself but on a believed truth. The third is called an addressee condition. This means that a statement is made to someone. So, so to speak, it is impossible to lie if there is no addressee. The fourth is the intention to deceive the addressee condition. There is much to be said and discussed about all four of these. It would be going too far to elaborate on them all here.⁵ For now, I will only go through some elements that are subject to this discussion which are important for the rest of this thesis. In this way, I also provide a working definition of lying for this thesis.⁶ The following points of attention correspond to some extent with the four just mentioned conditions of the definition of the lie. Issue one is about the statement- and untruthfulness condition. Issue two is about the addressee condition. And lastly, issue three is about the intention to deceive the addressee condition.

A first issue regarding the statement condition is that some writers suggest that lying has more to do with asserting than making a statement. Thus, in the definition 'making a statement' can be replaced by 'asserting'. This is because an assertion is more act based instead of a statement which is more declaration based. In relation to lying, this choice of words is then understandable because lying is more action-based rather than statement-based. This can be seen in analyses of lying such as Bernard Williams and Christopher O. Tollefsen. Both clearly bring out the close connection of an assertion with a lie as opposed to just a statement (Williams, 2002, p. 55) (Tollefsen, 2014, p. 18). Although this looks like a relatively minor detail in word choice, it has quite some impact on the definition. As I said, a statement focuses on the statement itself. However, in my opinion, a lie is also partly about how the person/liar relates to the statement. If we are talking about an assertion, then this relationship is also present in the definition. An assertion is an expression of a belief. A lie is then the conscious opposite expression of that belief. It is clear that there is a relationship between the speaker of the lie and the lie itself. In the first argument/learning point I will come back to this. For now it is enough to know that when I use the word lying in this thesis, I refer to an assertion instead of a statement.

A second point of attention relates to the addressee condition. An element that can be added to the definition of lying is that the addressee must have a right to the truth before something

⁵ For a good overview of all the points of view, I refer you to The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy where Mahon gives a great overview on the definition of lying (Mahon, 2015).

⁶ A working definition is not a fully supported definition of a concept. A working definition is about providing clarity in the use of that concept in the remainder of the text. There is much more to be said about lying than there is room for in this thesis. It is sufficient to move on to part two with a working definition and therefore such a long discussion is not necessary.

can be defined as a lie. This can for example be used to show that speaking a falsehood in the well-known example of a Nazi at the door is not a lie because the Nazi has no right to the truth (Tollefsen, 2014, p. 26). In the Tradition, this condition has been applied very little to lying. Bernard Williams writes that in a Traditional Christian view lying is always wrong, regardless of whether the addressee has a right to the truth. This condition, he says, has been applied to the use of deception and when it is or is not permitted (Williams, 2002, p. 77). To show what this means the famous example of Augustine is applicable here. Athanasius was rowing on the river to flee. He met his pursuers in the opposite direction, and they asked him: "where is Athanasius? He answered: "not far away". Technically, this is not a lie but only a deception. The 'right to the truth' condition can be used to show that in this case it is permissible to mislead, and this has been applied more often in the tradition.

Finally, it can be mentioned that Bernard Williams also uses this condition but not as an element of the definition of a lie itself. Williams is not a deontologist and thus leaves room for a lie and uses this condition only to show when it might be permitted to lie. I will not add this element to my working definition either.

A third problem concerning the definition of a lie, which is probably the most debated, concerns the intention to deceive. The words 'intention' and 'deceiving' may require some explanation, so I will give a brief description of them here before addressing the point about the intention-to-deceive condition. To deceive =_{df} to intentionally cause to have a false belief that is known or believed to be false (Mahon, 2015). I think this definition is sufficient for now and here again, intention comes to the fore. When you act with an intention, your goal is for that action to have the effect that you intended. For example, if a football player shoots a ball with the intention of putting it in the goal and succeeds, his intention has been fulfilled. But if it was not your intention to shoot at goal (which is usually the case with a goal in your own team goal), then it is an accident. It was not your intention to shoot the ball into your own goal. Thus, to intend something is something you want or plan to do. Of course, there is a lot of philosophical discussion about what that means in relation to these other concepts, but it would take us too far to go into that. The debate on this 'intention to deceive' component of the definition of lying can be divided into two groups: deceptionists and non-deceptionists. These groups can both also be completely subdivided into subcategories. For this thesis, it is not important to work this out completely. Don Fallis has a good analysis of this point of discussion. He "note[s] that philosophers typically are interested in lies that are intended to deceive" (Fallis, 2009). This also applies to the remainder of this thesis and so the intention to deceive is part of my working definition. A question that is important with regard to the intention to deceive is whether lying is distinctively wrong from merely deceiving or not. I will dive into this debate later in section 2.2.

A fourth and final point I would like to mention here comes from Don Fallis. His definition of a lie is "that (a) you say something that you believe to be false and (b) you believe that you are in a situation where the following norm of conversation is in effect: "Do not say what you believe to be false" (Fallis, 2009, p. 35). For me, it is mainly the second element that is important. I have already discussed the first in the foregoing. I find the component that a certain norm of conversation can be absent a valuable addition. It describes well that comedy, for example, is excluded because making an assertion in contrast to your beliefs are not considered wrong in that specific situation. Although the danger lurks that this can be applied arbitrarily, I think it is a good component for a working definition.

Now, finally, there is something to be said about several 'small' lies that sometimes receive a separate designation. These are white lies, prosocial lies and fibs. White lies are described as harmless lies (Sweetser, 1987, p. 54). Here, for example, it can be a lie on someone's deathbed that his or her child is doing well when, in fact, he or she is a drug addict. A prosocial lie

(sometimes also called a social lie) is a lie that does not harm social life but protects it (Sweetser, 1987, p. 54). Here we can think of all sorts of manners prescribed by etiquette. Complimenting someone on their clothes when you may not really mean it is, after all, good for social life. Finally, there are fibs. These are inconsequential lies told for selfish reasons (Sweetser, 1987, p. 54). In my opinion, white lies and fibs are nothing more than lies and should be treated as such. The fact that they don't cause any harm does not mean that telling a lie isn't wrong. In my opinion, these terms are therefore used to weaken the status of a lie. Prosocial lies are different in this respect. In such a case, the norm of conversation as described by Fallis is not in force.

Of course, there are many more objections to the standard definition. However, for the purposes of this thesis it is only important to come up with a working definition. In this I follow Bernard Williams because I think his definition fits well with what I generally understand by a lie. I also said however that the extra component of Don Fallis is a valuable addition. My working definition of a lie is therefore (a) to assert something that you believe is false with the intention that the other believes that assertion and (b) you believe that you are in a situation where the following norm of conversation is in effect: "Do not say what you believe to be false." When I write 'lying' in this thesis I mean this unless explicitly stated otherwise.

Perhaps unnecessarily, but just to be sure, I will repeat my thesis and what I am going to argue for. My thesis as stated in the beginning is: *A Christian-Traditional perspective that focusses on the actions of a person in a larger context has been overlooked in the debate on lying, however this perspective gives us insights into the nature of lying, teaches us how to act in general and show us the limits of our human capacity.* We have seen in the answer to the question "is it permitted to lie?" that there are mainly two camps defined: Deontology (Kantian) and Utilitarianism. However, I think that I showed enough that this 'simple' categorization has the consequence of missing some important insights in this debate. In the next part I would suggest that looking from a Christian-Traditional angle to it can enrich this debate. I won't argue that this is the only right view on the debate, but to classify it under one of these falls, in my opinion, too short. I also won't give answers on difficult cases whether lying is allowed or not, however, I will show that at least a Christian-Traditional viewpoint can teach us something for the solving of these cases.

Part two: Christian-Traditional insights

In this part I want to show that the Christian-Traditional perspective can provide valuable insights into this debate without denying the value of the other two camps, Utilitarianism and Deontology, as described in the introduction and part one. And as I said, these are just names and indicate a certain categorization but of course there are many different views within these groups. Of course, it is hard to group these Christian, Traditional and virtue-oriented ethics under one denominator. Andreas Kinneging however tried this and described this as ‘the European Tradition’ (2020). That is also the position from which I draw the following insights. And here, too, it must be said that these are not theological insights. However, this does not mean that there is one other type of argumentation from which all arguments derive. From this perspective, for example, arguments from consequentialist ethics, virtue ethics and value ethics come together. Patrick Nullens, in his book *Verlangen naar het goede; bouwstenen voor een christelijke ethiek* [Longing for the Good; Building Blocks for a Christian Ethics], describes this as the ‘multicolored nature of biblical ethics’ (Nullens, 2006, p. 258). For example, he demonstrates the value ethic by showing that literal Biblical commandments have a value in themselves. For example, the ninth commandment ‘thou shalt not bear false witness’ has both the value of truth and the value of communication in it (Nullens, 2006, p. 264). Thus, for now it is sufficient to know that in the following, non-Christian writers can also be brought forward, be it that I have to make the link between the Christian-Traditional insight and the argument of that writer clear. In the following, then, insights from a Christian-Traditional frame of mind are expressed and supported by various arguments.

2.1 *Lying makes you a liar*

The debate about lying has many different elements in it. This can also be seen in the introduction and part one above. As mentioned, the debate usually revolves around two important questions. For example, a lot has been written about when something is a lie or not. After all, it is important to have a good definition to define certain actions as a lie. In addition, from a utilitarian perspective, there is a lot of literature about whether and when lying is morally permissible or not. One element that I think is missing in this debate is what a lie actually entails and what values of our humanity this affects. There are sporadically good analyzes to be found of the influence of a lie on, for example, mutual trust or truth. However, this is an element that I think is underexposed. This is also understandable if we consider that the debate mainly takes place within the outlined camps of Utilitarianism and Deontology. An insight from the Christian view of man and the world is that when one does something bad, that is not the only thing. Benjamin B. Warfield is one who wrote this succinctly. In an article on repentance, he writes: “it is characteristic of heathen thought to look upon sin atomistically as only so many acts of sin ... the Christian conception probes deeper and finds behind the acts of sin the sinful nature” (Warfield, 1970, p. 280). In summary, doing sin also means that you are a sinner.

I am aware that this is not a popular view of humanity.⁷ In a sense, people strive to do good things and don't like to be pointed out for things that they are doing wrong. And certainly, people do not like that someone is considered bad because of a single wrongdoing. Andreas Kinneging also recognizes this in our Western (Dutch) society. He shows that through enlightenment thinking, which means equating good with fulfilling as many human desires as possible, the mindset is just that one does that by nature and that one can therefore do little bad (Kinneging, 2020, p. 59). The only restraining order for this is that harming the freedom of another is not allowed (p. 56). Yet if we apply this view to this debate, I suppose that we

⁷ This can be seen, for example, in the popularity of the recent book “Humankind: A Hopeful History” by Rutger Bregman (2020). In this book, he argues that most people are virtuous.

can learn something. So, for lying the Christian conception means: if you lie there is more to it than just telling a lie. It also makes you a liar. But what is the difference someone might ask. In either case, lying is wrong and that's it. Nevertheless, I do think there is a difference here. I will try to elaborate on this more clearly in the following. First, I will elaborate on what it means to be a liar in relation to the act of lying and in that sense I show why the Christian proposition is true. Subsequently, I want to talk about what this can teach us in the debate about lying. Of course, I will also deal with some counterarguments.

In a sense we can already say that this proposition is correct. Logically, it must be the case that there is a certain intentionality in an action from a person towards a person. When someone speaks, you can also reasonably say that he is (at that moment) a speaker. This also applies, for example, when someone drives a car. Then you can also call such a person a driver. So, in general it makes sense to label someone who lies as a liar. Yet there are things to think of where this principle is generally the case, but where you can also state that this intentionality does not always exist. For example, it is the case with hearing. It is possible for one who hears to not pay attention to what he hears. In general, it can be said that hearing noises also makes you a hearer, but in the event that he does not pay attention, it is not immediately clear that he is also a hearer. Taken literally, such a person does hear something, but in practice such a person is not labeled as a hearer. A similar thing is also the case with lying. If someone is lying (according to the working definition as I have put it⁸) it may be that he is not a liar immediately. Imagine someone is making an assertion to deceive someone, but it is obvious that the person is lying (this is apparent from all sorts of non-verbal characteristics), then such a person is not immediately labeled a liar. Literally, the proposition is still true, but practice may deviate from this. As can be seen from this, the literal meaning is logical, but this still does not get us to what it actually means to be a liar. Is it then just a sort of symbolic meaning without actual practical value? Although in the traditional views and Christianity there is a lot of symbolism there is also practical value. That is what I want to show now.

To understand what it means to be a liar, we need to dig a little deeper into what communication is exactly. As I will show, it has to do with communication rules. There are several important aspects of communication in a society. Logically, one literally has to speak the same language in order to have verbal communication. However, understanding each other is not just knowing and interpreting words literally since communication is also related to a correct interpretation of different meanings of the same word. In addition, there is also a lot to do in communication with regard to non-verbal communication. However, verbal communication is especially important for the subject of lying, although it can be recognized from non-verbal communication whether someone is lying or not. Yet non-verbal elements have a lot of influence on the interpretation of verbal communication and therefore they are closely related. For both these forms of communication, but certainly for verbal communication with regard to lying, it is important to be able to rely on interlocutors that in a certain sense they adhere to same rules for communication. This ensures as little miscommunication as possible. There are of course many possibilities when these rules can be violated. In the case of lying, these rules are also violated and, as I will show in the following, this has a major influence on mutual trust.

Now that we know that (fruitful) communication can exist because there are rules, it is important to see what kind of rules there are that are relevant to our subject of lying. In part

⁸ It could of course be the case that you place certain examples outside the definition. See for instance the viewpoint of Don Fallis as described in the part one.

one we already partly saw what it means to lie. This is when someone utters an assertion that is not in accordance with the belief that he himself has about this assertion. If someone thinks they are telling the truth, we cannot say that they are lying. But if someone consciously pronounces his belief incorrectly, this is a lie. In communication, it is generally assumed that assertions made by someone correspond to the beliefs of that person (because an assertion is an expression of a belief). Of course, there can be exceptions, but I won't go into that because for now it is enough to know that this general rule makes sense. So, it is necessary to be sincere, to speak according to your beliefs, as to not harm that assumption (Williams, 2002, p. 59). If this violation does happen, then the one who lies does not follow this rule of communication. So, such a person is not sincere. The result of not being sincere is that others do not trust you anymore. And precisely a lack of trust in the person who has lied shows that there is more to it than just whether the person has lied or not. Now we can see what it means to be a liar. It turns out that lying is the result of someone's insincerity. The one who notices that someone is lying labels him therefore as a 'liar' because being a liar means that you cannot be trusted. As a result, the mutual trust bond is broken, and practice shows that it is difficult to restore this bond. That is not just because of a lie but because the speaker of a false assertion is labeled a liar.⁹ In addition to this, Williams rightly points out that avoiding lying is not enough to achieve trustworthiness (Williams, 2002, p. 74). I will elaborate on that in the argument about truthfulness and dishonesty in section 2.2. For now, the point is that lying breaks trust and the fact that others have a lack of trust in you as a person is exactly what it means to be a liar.

There are, however, two counterargument that can be made here that I must address. First, someone may object that the bond of trust is not directly broken. The consequences of, for example, white lies or fibs are then less serious and perhaps the designation of liar is then a bit too severe. I agree that the so-called 'smaller lies' have less influence on breaking the bond of trust. However, in my opinion it does have an impact on the bond of trust. Perhaps this becomes clearer with a metaphor. The bond of trust is like a wall. A 'big lie' is like a battering ram against the wall and can break down the wall with a single blow. Smaller lies, on the other hand, are like small stones thrown against the wall. The wall does not suddenly collapse. However, after a number of pebbles, the wall will also begin to show weaknesses and eventually it will collapse. It is the same with smaller lies and so they also affect the bond of trust. So, there are degrees to how quickly the bond of trust is broken. This shows that the bond of trust might not be directly broken but it is clear that lies have influence on this bond of trust.

Secondly, there can be made another counterargument. This is actually a criticism of the Christian association with this insight. Nevertheless, it is valuable to address it. To say that a person who expresses a lie is also immediately a liar has certainly in the Christian context similarities with the concept of sin and therefore also directly with the concept of sinner. This concept has the negative connotation that the nature of people would be sinful. And that can make people afraid, which is not always a good state of mind. In my view, the criticism that it can be dangerous to elaborate on this subject is therefore correct. However, this is, so to speak, only one side of the coin. Regardless of whether it is true or not that evil lurks in people, the naming of this statement cannot be done without another concept that has a large place in Christian thinking. This is the concept of forgiveness. What is that exactly? Forgiveness is an act by someone who has suffered damage towards the person who caused the damage. Forgiveness goes hand in hand with a will to leave the past behind, and thus also the will to leave the guilt behind from the one who caused you harm. Forgiveness, then, has the valuable character of a new start with someone who has done something to you. To forgive someone

⁹ Of course, this also holds for the so-called inconsequential white lies and fibs.

is to stop blaming them. Of course, in practice, after forgiveness not everything is forgotten. With regard to a lie that means that the bond of trust is not immediately restored, but it does give the possibility of moving on. Therefore, one does not have to remain stuck in the stigma of sinner or liar.¹⁰ It is, so to speak, an important first step in restoring a relationship of trust. This does not make the relationship of trust immediately what it was before; that requires more and I will go into that in more detail in section 2.2.

To conclude, one last point of insight regarding the statement that the use of a lie also makes someone a liar. So far we have seen what it means to label someone as a liar. The same premise 'lying makes you a liar' also taught us that lying is problematic because of the consequences of the broken trust bond between humans which is needed for communication. Although this is in some sense a consequentialist argument, I would say that it also reveals that lying is bad in itself. Why? I showed that being a liar has to do with a lack of trust between dialogue partners. Yes, even more so, that the breakdown of trust is a direct consequence of telling a lie. The more lies or the more powerful the lie, the less there is a bond of trust. This is inherently linked so to speak. Thus, stating that lying makes you a liar teaches us that in that sense the consequences of lying and the wrongness of lying in itself are intertwined. This shows that lying should be avoided all the more, because it is not just one reason from one camp but both reasons are simultaneously true. This, but also the foregoing, shows that a Christian-Traditional insight on lying shows us something of the nature of lying and other relevant related concepts which has been overlooked in the current debate.

2.2 Truthfulness and dishonesty

As is clear from the introduction, there are two important questions regarding lying. These arise logically when we talk about lying. It is of course important to talk about lying and to know whether it is allowed or not. And of course, it is important to know what lying is. However, these two questions may not do justice to the reality of things. There is more to life than lying, so to speak. In the foregoing, we have seen the connection between truth, truthfulness, sincerity and trust and lying. Perhaps you feel it too, honesty and truthfulness are broader than the abstinence of lying. Perhaps there is too much emphasis in the debate on the two aforementioned questions about lying. In this part I want to show that the focus on lying indeed falls short of the reality of living together. As a side node, in what follows, I talk about lying and truth telling in general. So, I am not dealing with extreme cases such as the case of the Nazi at the door.

¹⁰ This is at least the case for the one who has forgiven the liar. There are, of course, other entities to name for which the liar could still be found guilty. One possible entity is, for example, the truth. In the following I will give a justification for why someone can be found guilty towards the truth. As we have seen, lying is an act that damages communication rules and mutual trust of people. As showed, this can be called a 'sin against humanity'. However, a lie is logically also related to the truth. Now we have seen that the act of a lie itself has little to do with it by definition because it may be the case that someone unaware of what the exact truth is, need not lie anyway because he speaks in accordance with his belief about the truth. Yet lying has to do with truth if the liar makes an assertion that contradicts the truth. His belief is then in accordance with that truth, but that he is lying because he is not asserting corresponding to his judgement on that truth. Now it is true that 'truth' in itself cannot be affected because one can say that the truth 'is'. Yet, in my view, lying in relation to truth does have important aspects. I would describe this as 'sin against truth'. That is of course something else than the trust that is damaged between people in a society. This goes deeper, or more precisely 'higher'. It is not immanent to humanity but transcendent, beyond the directly visible 'being'. Concealing the truth has an impact on the speed at which truth moves through the world. Of course, this does not detract from the truth itself, but it does make the truth less valued. Of course, this mainly has adverse consequences for all people, but here is a transcendent element. That transcendent element is 'truth'. In my opinion, what lies in relation to truth is about the fact that by stating that someone is a liar we can also say that someone is guilty of not telling 'the truth'. After all, the truth is worth telling. In that sense, the truth is not affected, but the liar is guilty towards the truth.

So why exactly is it a Christian insight in practice that we should refrain from looking just at lying? For I will not deny that tradition and Christian thought have given much attention to the wrongness of lying per se. A distinction has often been made in Christian thought between lying and all kinds of other deception. We see this, for example, in the application of the 'right to the truth' component as defined in the part one (section 1.2). This condition is often applied to when deception is permissible. In the case of a lie, this component is often rejected. So yes, this strict division between deception on the one hand and lying on the other is partly caused by Christian thinking. Perhaps that is why the following is also an insight that has been overlooked in the Christian-Tradition as well, and in a sense it is therefore also an internal criticism. But still there is no answer to the question why this is a Christian insight. The Bible, the book and often the standard for Christian thinking, often speaks of 'lying', 'the lie' or 'false witness'. But in addition, and this is perhaps overlooked in the camp of Christian thinkers, the Bible also speaks about honesty. In Romans 12:17 for instance, Paul writes "Provide things honest in the sight of all men" (Authorized (King James) Version). So, from the Bible, it is not only important to refrain from lying but also to be honest. This is of course in not by any means an argument in this thesis that honesty is also important in addition to avoiding a lie. This was only to show that this also fits within a Christian-Traditional framework. In the following I will give a justification of this Christian-Traditional insight.

However, before I will start with the justification it is important clarify the relevant definitions. The definition of lying and the relevant discussion points are already described in the part one. Similarly to the debate on the definition of lying, there is also a wide discussion on the definition of deceiving. However, it goes too far to elaborate on this completely here, so I will only mention the basic definition. This is sufficient to allow the following to be properly followed. Thus, 'to deceive =_{df} to intentionally cause to have a false belief that is known or believed to be false' (Mahon, 2015). When we compare it to the definition of lying, the main difference between deceiving and lying is then the element of (mostly) verbal communication. But, as we will see later, it is not that all deceiving with use of linguistic exchange is lying. To proceed to the justification of valuing dishonesty in addition to lying it is good to say that this debate is actually about the relationship between lying on the one hand and deceiving on the other. Two groups can be distinguished in this debate. Alex Barber (2019), in his article *Lying, Misleading and Dishonesty*, elaborates on the two sides of this debate on lying and deceiving. First, the group that says lying is not distinctively wrong. This is actually a counteroffer to the strictness of the position on lying of Kant and, for example, Aquinas. As a representative of this camp, Barber takes Jennifer Saul. In short, Saul's argument is as follows. If there is a difference in lying and deceiving, there must be a moral difference in either outcome or motive or method used. However, there is no difference in outcome and motive, and the difference in method is morally irrelevant according to her. Thus, there is no difference between lying and merely deceiving (Saul, 2012).¹¹ On the other side the group that says that lying is distinctively wrong than deceiving. There is a series of arguments that Seana Valentine Shiffrin puts forward to show that lying is a distinct moral category (Shiffrin, 2014). It would be going too far to go through them all in this thesis. There is, however, one point that Barber notes as valuable and that is that Shiffrin shows that lying has more to it than deliberate deception. Barber says:

Lying can also be wrong because it abuses the social practice of communicating by linguistic exchange. Her [Shiffrin's] only mistake is to assume that this holds only of

¹¹ This is in short a summary by Alex Barber (2019, p. 7) of Saul's argument as described in chapter 4 of her book: *Lying, misleading, and what is said: an exploration in philosophy of language and in ethics*.

lying. The moral kind she brings into relief occupies a wider conceptual space. (Barber, 2019, p. 12)

I agree with Shiffrin and Barber that a lie unattached is more wrong than simple deception. This then refers to a situation where all other variables are constant, and the only difference is a deception or a lie. After all, if other variables change, a deception may be just as bad or perhaps worse. Shiffrin's reason for the distinct wrongness of lying is that it is an abuse against the social practice of linguistic exchange. I hold this view for the same reason as Shiffrin.¹² However, Barber indicates that this "abuse against the social practice of linguistic exchange" can be applied to more than a lie. He introduces the term 'dishonesty'. This term encompasses more undesirable acts than a lie and, in his view, is much more valuable in practice. But what does he mean by this? And what exactly is the difference with a lie? This I will try to make clear.

Barber's definition for dishonesty =_{df} expressing that p when one knows p to be untrue (Barber, 2019, p. 12). This is close to the standard definition of a lie. The main difference is the use of the word 'expressing' rather than 'making a statement' (and of course the deceiving element is not included). However, in part one it already became clear in the definition of a lie that in my opinion this does not come down to a 'statement' but an 'assertion'. In the first argument about lying makes you a liar, I tried to elaborate on this by showing what it means to lie and thus to be a liar. I demonstrated the close relationship between a lie and a belief. An assertion is more logical to use in the definition of a lie instead of a statement because an assertion is an expression of a judgment of a belief. And as we have seen in the previous argument a lie is exactly that. Something then is a lie when it is a false assertion. And that can rightly be called an 'abuse of the social practice of communication by linguistic exchange'. But someone can still be dishonest without a lie according to Barber, and I agree. It is possible to 'express something that p when one knows p to be untrue' which is not a lie. This is because expressing is broader than asserting as well as dishonesty is broader than lying. But what does it mean to express? I would say the following. The fact is that people have several beliefs. And if someone expresses only a few beliefs and omits some, that person is speaking only half the truth. Telling a half-truth is not a lie, so to speak, but it is dishonest. And this is still as Barber describes "to abuse the social practice of communicating by linguistic exchange" (Barber, 2019, p. 13).

And what does this mean for this debate? In general (of course this excludes the extreme situations such as a Nazi at the door) nobody likes it when someone only tells a half-truth, and thus is dishonest. But what is the advantage we have now by knowing this? It gives us insight in practical situations. Because in practice we sort of assess people on their honesty. In argument one (section 2.1) we saw that trust is a vital component of communication. We also saw that the avoidance of lying prevents harm to mutual trust. But to build trust there is more needed. As Bernard Williams puts it 'trustworthiness is more than the avoidance of lying' (2002, p. 74). To use the metaphor of the wall again, we can say that avoiding lying does not break down the wall, but it takes more to rebuild the wall if it is damaged. It requires a kind of active action. It is therefore important to look at more than at lying. Thus, to build trust and create trustworthiness you should be truthful. Truthfulness is needed to be trusted and to have because of that good communication. You can also rely on what someone imply when he is truthful. And as Williams puts it, it is "better when we can more or less rely on what

¹² However, I also think that there is an extra argument imaginable. As I tried to make clear in the previous argument about being a liar, deliberately telling a lie is not only a problem for communication. It might also be a kind of 'sin against truth'. This transcendent element then makes it, for a separate reason, worse than deceiving someone else.

people imply as well as on what they assert; it is worse when we cannot even rely on what they assert” (Williams, 2002, p. 83). I think this showed why the focus on lying in some way falls short. And that is why the insight from a Christian-Traditional perspective is a good insight for the debate. It is not necessarily the aim of this thesis to make people more honest, but perhaps this insight will make people think about their own attitude in this world towards their fellow human beings.

2.3 The unattainable good

In contrast to the previous two insights, this insight deals with examples of extreme situations. And with extreme situations, I mean situations where lying is usually considered acceptable because the benefits of lying are higher than the cost of lying itself. This often concerns situations such as saving someone's life by lying or at least preventing a big(ger) evil. This is where the positions of the two standardly described camps encounter. The Utilitarian camp will argue that a greater good must be pursued. And the Deontological camp will either be very strict and not accept a lie or, as we have already seen, change elements of the definition so that it is still permissible to make a statement contrary to an inner belief in this type of situation. I will first briefly touch on how the Traditional Christian view usually stands on this and then present an insight that may give more insight into things as they are.

As we have seen in the part one, the Christian-Traditional view is usually placed in the Deontological camp. We have also seen that this is comprehensible because there are many in the Christian view who reject lying at all times. Yet there are also those who look at this in a more utilitarian manner and in extreme situations come to the conclusion that a choice must be made to lie. I deliberately say 'in a more utilitarian way' because it is not a completely utilitarian way of thinking. As I have shown at the beginning of the three insights, Patrick Nullens observes that a Christian vision has many different values in it. This he calls 'the multicolored nature of Biblical ethics' (Nullens, 2006, p. 258). And I think that in these more extreme cases this comes out well. For example, there are many who, because of the absolute character of God (and commandments) choose never to allow and use the lie, but there are also those who highlight another hue of the color spectrum such as utility. In any case, both aspects come into consideration. In addition, I think this is an accurate analysis of how reality works. Most people will carry both values within them. Of course, it may be that someone only makes choices by weighing up consequences, and never worries about other values. Yet many will recognize the difficult struggle between these two ways of reasoning. I will elaborate on this in a moment. Initially I want to define what the Christian understanding is before I elaborate on its meaning and value for the debate.

Something we can call a Christian-Traditional insight is that when one has to choose between two evils it does not automatically mean that one of the choices is also the only absolute morally right choice. I can best explain this with the example of the Nazi at the door. Logically, there are two options to choose from. The first option is not to lie, that is, to tell the truth that the person the Nazi is asking for is actually inside your house. This will (as a side-effect) result in the murder of that person. The second option is to use a lie. You can say for example: "He is not here, he left fifteen minutes ago". This ensures that the Nazi leaves and the one inside your house is spared. A Utilitarian chooses to lie, because it saves a life. A (strict) Kantian, reasoning in a deontological way, chooses not to lie. Both will argue that their choice is morally right. Whatever the reason may be, I will not go into that now, but the Kantian says: 'it is the morally right choice not to lie, even if it leads to such a tragic thing'. And the Utilitarian says, 'it is the morally right choice to lie'. A Christian-Traditional understanding of this debate is as follows. Suppose one chooses to lie, and thus saves a life, that choice is never good or morally right. At best it is only 'allowed'. And this can also be true the other way around. If you choose not to lie and thus allow a murder, that is not necessarily a morally

right or good choice either. It is merely the better of two evils. In theological terms: whichever choice you make, it is accompanied with sin. Of course, within Christian thought there are those who do choose one side or the other and argue for it, but the Christian-Traditional perspective does offer this insight as an extra option, so to speak. In the Christian debate, the second (deontological) version is regularly seen as a morally right choice. By this I mean that you are usually not seen as guilty by supporters of this position because the death of the person in your house is not directly your fault. You are then the direct object. I will come back to this later. But what does this mean in practice? Because in the practical situation, there are logically only two options, tell a lie or tell the truth. In the end, the sequel is exactly the same, isn't it? I will try to explain why in my view it is not.

As I said, in this kind of extreme issue of lying, deep values collide. Obviously, this is not only the case in this debate. Another example of a debate where the values of Deontology and Utilitarianism are opposed is the debate about warfare. In war there are also situations where utilitarian reasons and deontological considerations collide. From this debate on warfare, I will draw an insight that is in line with the insight from a Christian perspective that I am describing here. With this example I will make clear why it also provides a good addition to the debate on lying. When we talk about war, especially laws of war and martial law, we are talking about certain actions that we exclude from warfare situations, even if that particular action could have many good consequences. We therefore use deontological reasons instead of utilitarian reasons. But what is the morality of such laws? Consistently in a utilitarian way, any means can be justified by the end it achieves. An example of it is that when you are a pacifist and you say that war is not a good thing, when there is war, you would say that a lot of questionable actions are allowed to stop the war. Yet there are certain things that we prohibit in martial law, even there is for instance the noble goal of stopping the war. An example of such a prohibition is the killing of civilians, especially women and children. We can say that in warfare usually choices are made for utilitarian reasons but they may be constrained by deontological values. Hence it is clear that the same values play a role in this debate as in the debate about lying because in the debate on lying in extreme cases the same values collide. Thomas Nagel (1988) recognizes and describes these values in relation to warfare in his article *War and Massacre*. He describes the positions as Utilitarianism and Absolutism. Utilitarianism makes a decision depend on the consequences of a certain action. A strict Utilitarian would thus approve the bombing of a village that resulted in civilian deaths, as long as the benefits were significant enough to 'compensate' for this loss. A Utilitarian is thus focused on what will happen as a consequence. An absolutist is the description of someone who does not do something because that action is wrong in itself (Nagel, 1988, p. 52). I would say that it is therefore a specific version of deontology. In this case we are, for example, talking about the use of atomic weapons. An absolutist may also consider certain actions against certain persons to be impermissible. This category includes, for example, the bombing of civilian targets. Bombing then is not a problem in itself, but it is a problem of who you use it against. If these types of action are not right for the absolutist, he will not use them. So, Absolutism is focused on what someone does. Yet Absolutism is not a denial of consequences. Rather, it is a limit to utilitarian reasoning (Nagel, 1988, p. 56). The conflict between them is not just because there are different outcomes, they are also choices between alternative pathways or measures to be taken (Nagel, 1988, p. 52). But what is the justification for absolutist decision-making? In relation to the Nazi at the door case, and later I will elaborate on that application, what might be a reason to justify to take a strict position and do not use a lie? Again, Nagel addresses this, in relation to warfare, in his article.

I have just hinted at a first possible justification for Absolutism, but not yet mentioned it by name. It concerns the so-called Law of Double Effect. In short, this law states that there is a morally relevant difference between killing someone deliberately or using death as a means to

achieve something better and bringing it about or permitting it as a side-effect of something else one does deliberately (Nagel, 1988, p. 58). Thomas Nagel says he appreciates the insights it provides but also says he does not consider its use sufficient to defend the position of Absolutism. This is because there are many situations where it still creates ambiguity when there should be none, and I agree (Nagel, 1988, p. 59). Nevertheless, in my opinion this Law of Double Effect gives us good insight into the case of the Nazi at the door. After all, an absolutist (deontological) position might partly be defensible because the death of the person in your house is a side-effect of not lying. The direct blame of the death is therefore not on you as a person but logically on the Nazi. This of course applies to death. Obviously, our subject is lying, and a lie cannot be the subject of the Law of Double Effect. So, although this Law of Double Effect provides us with an insight into situations where the value of life and the value of truth are in conflict, it is not sufficient for any justification of an absolutist position to refuse to lie. However, the next point Nagel makes as a justification for an absolutist position is quite applicable to the lie and, in my view, is also sufficient to say that an absolutist position is defensible. By this I do not mean that I take this position, but I only want to show that both ways of reasoning can coexist. The reason that in an absolutist position something is wrong in itself has to do with the fact that that action (in this case lying) puts you in a certain special relation to that person (Nagel, 1988, p. 66). So, what does this mean for the two positions? In a utilitarian approach, you perceive the world from a larger perspective and distribute costs and benefits from that perspective. A lie can therefore be used for the greater good and it does not matter who does it. From an absolutist perspective on the contrary, what matters is what you do as a person. Not to keep a clean slate, so to speak, but because you are deeply convinced that such an action should not be used by nobody at all. We have seen in the definition of the lie that a requirement is that there is an addressee (the addressee condition). From this it becomes clear that when you commit a lie, you are in a special relationship with that person. If you find lying reprehensible and think that nobody should use it, for whatever additional reasons, it means that you should certainly not use that lie now, for you are face to face with the addressee. It is clear that this is a deontological way of reasoning, but the absolutist element in it is thus justified by the special relationship that arises with the addressee. According to Nagel this still is an impetus or direction for an argument, and I agree, but in any case, it makes clear that there is justification possible for such a position. It was of course also not the intention to give a complete justification. For now, it is not a question of what the answer should actually be. It only shows that besides the utilitarian perspective, which everyone will feel is a justifiable principle in the situation of a Nazi at the door, the absolutistic (deontological) perspective also has a right to exist. Both exist side by side but are nonetheless incompatible. And it is precisely there that the difficulty of making a choice arises. However, it is specifically at this point that the additional Christian insight in this situation comes to the fore.

The two values involved in the case of the Nazi at the door are utilitarian on the one hand and absolutistic (deontological) on the other. These two values, which are often both found in people (unless you have rationally explicitly chosen one side), are in conflict in cases such as the Nazi at the door. Yet in both, there is an element of truth that makes it morally obligatory to follow the value. Suppose that for utilitarian reasons you choose to lie then you will still feel guilty towards the absolutistic principle. And the other way round is of course exactly the same. If you choose to stick to the absolutist principle you will still feel guilty towards the utilitarian principle. But, as mentioned earlier, from a Christian perspective, being an absolutist (which corresponds to the commonly held position of the falsity of a lie) is primarily about choosing to lie for utilitarian reasons. But such a person 'will find it difficult to feel that the moral dilemma has been satisfactorily resolved' (Nagel, 1988, p. 72). Someone then feels that he has not provided sufficient justification for the violation of the opposite principle. There is consequently no good choice in this situation. This may be a somewhat pessimistic

view, nevertheless I think it is correct. In fact, it appears that we should never have been in such a situation. Yet we are, and I would dare to say that situations like this show us the brokenness of this world.¹³

¹³ As with the first argument and learning point, there is also room here for a connection to the transcendent. It would be going too far to elaborate on this completely, due to a lack of space in this thesis and a lack of expertise in this on my part. Nevertheless, I want to point out the direction in which a possible argument lies. The reason for the difference between a Utilitarian and Christian-Traditional perspective, and the corresponding difference in judgement as just discussed, has to do with a difference in definition of 'the good'. For a Utilitarian, the good is to create the most happiness for the most people. This is clearly immanent to human existence. A Christian Traditionalist perspective grasps towards something higher. The good and the truth are usually identified with the existence of God. The will to 'follow God' is therefore directed towards the transcendent. In addition to God being 'the good' and 'the true', it is generally assumed in Christian thought that God is the source of life. One might also say that God is 'Life' and 'Truth' (John 14:6). Here it appears that there should not be a conflict between life and death, one should never have come into such a situation, which is yet the case with the Nazi at the door. And having to choose between one of those two, which is the case with the dilemma of the Nazi at the door, the choice can never be good. 'The good' is after all both 'Life' and 'Truth'. An answer to the question whether one should lie or not in the case of the Nazi at the door is never 'good' in the Christian-Traditional view. At best, it is the lesser of two evils. Of course, this argument needs more (philosophical) elaboration before it can be a valuable argument. For now, then, I have merely indicated it as a direction in which the transcendent element in Christian-traditional thought might be justified relative to immanent utilitarian thought.

Conclusion

Although the term Christian is rightly associated with religion and theology, this movement can also be approached from a more philosophical angle. Since it then stands in a broader context, I used the term Christian-Traditional in this thesis to characterize certain insights under one denominator. This because in my opinion the debate around lying is too much centered around two other movements which can be called Deontology and Utilitarianism. It is not so much about all aspects of these ethical camps but more about the general way of reasoning for these groups. In this sense, the aim is not to stereotype the debate. Nevertheless, the existence of this dichotomy in the debate on lying cannot be denied. The aim of this thesis was therefore to argue the correctness of the following thesis: *A Christian-Traditional perspective that focusses on the actions of a person in a larger context has been overlooked in the debate on lying, however this perspective gives us insights into the nature of lying, teaches us how to act in general and show us the limits of our human capacity.*

In part one, I first showed that the two groups of Deontology and Utilitarianism, as just described, are indeed the most common lines of reasoning in answering the question of whether lying is permissible or not. In this way, it has become clear that Christian-Traditional insights are indeed overlooked in the debate. In addition, it is of course important to know exactly what lying entails. The debate on this is very extensive because it is also intricately intertwined with the question of whether lying is permissible or not. Therefore, I only tried to define a working definition for this thesis. This working definition was: A lie is therefore (a) to assert something that you believe is false with the intention that the other believes that assertion and (b) you believe that you are in a situation where the following norm of conversation is in effect: "Do not say what you believe to be false." Thus, in part one I have demonstrated the correctness of the first part of the thesis and created a working definition in order to have a clear idea of what I am talking about when I use the word lie in the second part of this thesis.

In part two, I then tried to demonstrate the second part of the thesis. I presented three different Christian-Traditional insights, demonstrated their truth, and outlined their value to the debate.

The first is that lying also makes you a liar. At first glance this seems obvious, and it is, but there is a deeper reason why this is true. It gives us more insight into the nature of lying, so to speak. This has to do with the mutual trust that is necessary for good communication. By a lie, this bond of trust is damaged, and others will treat you as a liar. However, there are some consequences to this statement. That is why I have shown that this kind of assertion must also be accompanied by the possibility to forgive a liar. In general the statement shows that avoiding lies is very necessary.

The second insight is that the focus on lying may fail to take into account the complexity of the situation in practice. Now, in the debate, there is a discussion about the relationship between deception on the one hand and lying on the other. Alex Barber indicates that in practice it is not just about these things. In practice, it is about all the abuses against 'the social practice of communicating by linguistic exchange'. The opposite of this is then honesty and truthfulness. That has more to it than just the avoidance of lying. For it is better if we can also trust what someone implies than just assume that someone is not telling lies.

The third insight shows the limits of the capacity we have as human beings. Using the work of Thomas Nagel on warfare, I have shown that in a Christian-Traditional perspective, because of an absolutist component, there can never be a good answer to a case like the Nazi at the door. This is because, by definition, one cannot fulfil an absolutist position if, for other reasons (utilitarian reasons, for example), one chooses to lie in this case. And this also applies the other way round, although it is less relevant within a Christian-Traditional perspective.

In this way, I have tried to show, by means of three different insights, which nonetheless have a certain connection with each other, that it is valuable not to be blinded by a categorization in the current debate, but that there are insights available from another perspective, namely a Christian-Traditional perspective, of which it is valuable to bring back into the debate.

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