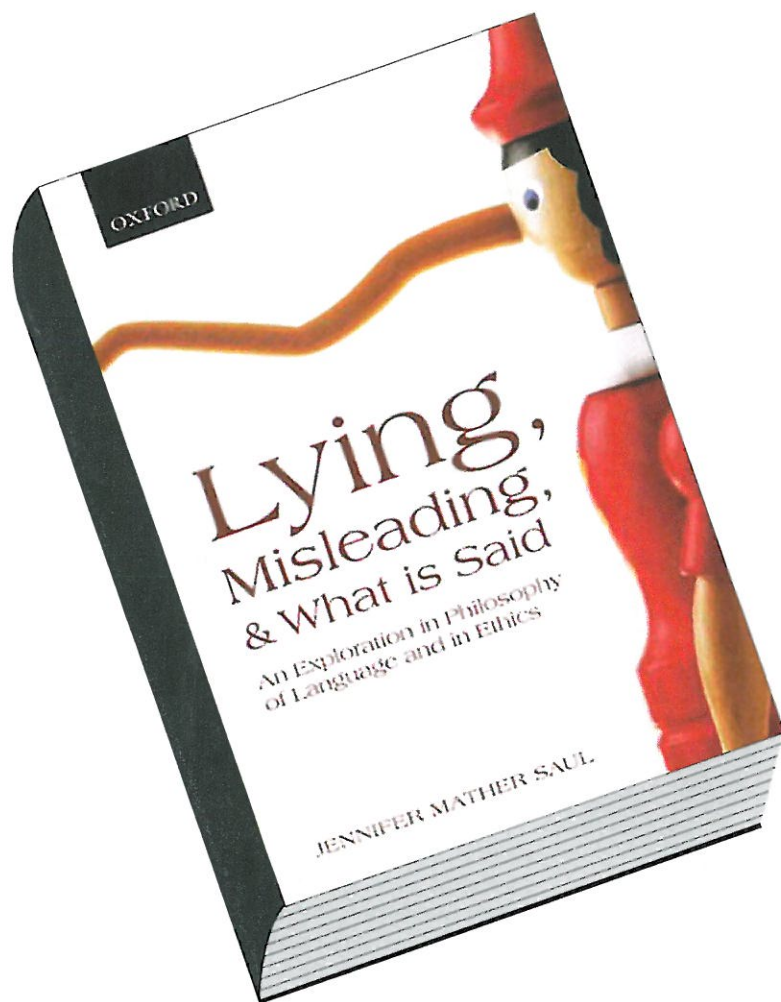


In search of the truth about fibs

Ishani Maitra considers an exploration of the forms deception takes – and their moral significance



Lying, Misleading, & What is said:
An Exploration in Philosophy
of Language and in Ethics
By Jennifer Mather Saul
Oxford University Press, 160pp, £30.00
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Some of the best work in recent philosophy has involved crossing sub-disciplinary boundaries, between ethics and epistemology, for instance, or epistemology and philosophy of language. Jennifer Mather Saul's new book on lying continues this happy trend. Lies are of interest to both ethicists and philosophers of language, and Saul's book advances both fields by bringing them closer together.

Lying, it is commonly thought, is worse than misleading. But to

see if this is right, we need to capture the contrast between the two. There is a long tradition, going back at least to Augustine, which holds that lying requires an intention to deceive. More recent work in philosophy has cast doubt on this requirement. After all, you can lie even when you know that your audience knows you are lying, and so, also know that they will not be misled. In keeping with this line of thought, Saul characterises lying not in terms of a deceptive intention but rather as saying what the liar believes to be false while taking themselves to be in a context in which they have promised, explicitly or implicitly, to tell the truth. (She restricts this definition to cases in which the speaker speaks literally and does not misspeak.)

Saul is here relying on the distinction between saying something and conveying it in some more tacit or roundabout manner. That distinction, she suggests, is crucial to explaining the contrast between lying and merely misleading. But what does the distinction amount to? This is fairly well-trodden territory within philosophy of language but approaching the question with an eye to the lying-misleading contrast gives Saul fresh insights. She argues that existing notions of saying miscategorise some lies as mere misleading, or vice versa. In their stead, she sketches a new notion of saying that promises to do better on this front.

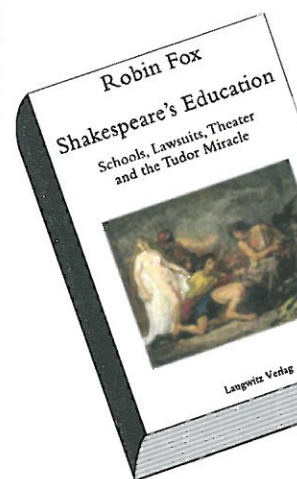
Having thus illuminated the contrast between lying and merely misleading, Saul turns to its moral significance. Here she takes on a range of attempts, from Kant to more contemporary writers, to make the case that misleading is generally morally preferable to lying. Although this may be true in some special contexts, such as in the witness box, Saul argues that the generalisation does not hold. Moreover, she offers some compelling diagnoses of why we are prone to this error. It is tempting to think that someone who is misled participates in their own deception, and so shares responsibility for it, in a way that someone who is lied to does not. The liar feeds their audience falsehoods; the misleader merely puts falsehoods around for their audience to take. But Saul shows that this reasoning is flawed twice over. For one thing, once we see what is involved in grasping what is said, this putative difference in participation vanishes. More importantly, even had that difference held up, it would not make a moral difference. The fraudster is not morally preferable to the burglar.

Saul's writing is clear and lively, presenting theoretical notions and debates in a manner that should be accessible to readers from a variety of backgrounds. Her discussion is enlivened throughout by vivid examples, many of which

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are taken (perhaps unsurprisingly given the focus of her book on recent politics. Bill Clinton's utterances concerning his relationship with Monica Lewinsky are a particularly central role. Some points in the book might have been given more extended discussion than they receive. For instance, I found myself wondering what the book's context as one in which participants have promised implicitly to tell the truth. But on the whole, the book makes real progress on some important philosophical questions, and is an entertaining and rewarding read to boot.

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Shakespeare's Education:
Schools, Lawsuits, Theater
and the Tudor Miracle
By Robin Fox
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In October 2011 a highly respected and state-sanctioned charity committed an act of subversion. It wasn't exactly revolutionary but it had the desired effect of attracting attention. Following the release of Roland Emmerich's executive film, *Anonymous*, which attributes Shakespeare's works to Edward de Vere, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust temporarily taped over the "Shakespeare" in the road signs that welcome visitors and jaded residents to "Warwickshire: Shakespeare County". It wasn't exactly Greenham Common but it's the closest such an august institution comes to an act of civil disobedience.

When you claim Shakespeare didn't write the works of Shakespeare, you can expect some impassioned responses. Why