Chapter 11 – Lying, Cheating, Breaking Promises, and Stealing

General Overview
The issues that make up the content of this chapter constitute the basic fabric of everyday moral life cutting across our public and private lives. All of us will have experience with at least one of these topics.

Class Suggestions
Get to class early and carefully place several $20 bills at discreet but clearly noticeable locations (that you can keep track of!). If they haven’t been handed in at the beginning of class, announce that later you will give the results of a moral experiment that you have performed with the students. When you come to ask for your money back you should also raise questions about the morality of the experiment. Another less risky but equally provocative example that I sometimes begin with is to ask students whether they have downloaded music from the Internet (or taped a copy of a CD from a friend). Almost every 18 to 19 old has. Get them to try to justify this and a number of the basic views on these topics will present themselves (everyone does it, it’s all right if you don’t get caught, you’d be a naïve loser if you didn’t take advantage, etc.) and you can start to get these reasons onto the board as a basis for further exploration. Again use the cases and encourage students to offer up some of the relevant situations that they’ve found themselves in.
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**Key Concepts:** Lying, White lies, Acts and Omissions, Cheating, Promises, Stealing, Fairness, Rights, Consequentialism, Nonconsequentialism

**Key Questions:** 1. Is lying ever morally justifiable? What about ‘white lies’? Use examples to illustrate your answer. 2. ‘If you don’t cheat to get ahead you’ll be a loser’. Discuss the morality of this statement. On what grounds is it justifiable or not? 3. According to what principles and in what situations might it be acceptable to break a promise? 4. Is stealing morally acceptable in some situations? Critically examine the arguments for and against stealing. 5. Compare and contrast the consequentialist and nonconsequentialist positions on some of these issues. Which position is the best overall and why?

**Chapter Summary**

Many of the issues dealt with here apply to the preceding chapter and the next three chapters.

**Nonconsequentialist and Consequentialist views**

*Role nonconsequentialists views*

Opposed to the four acts: Kant, for example, the acts cannot be universalized

*Consequentialist and act nonconsequentialist views*

**Act nonconsequentialism**

If one feels like lying or cheating then it’s okay.

**Consequentialism**

The four acts may or may not be justifiable depending upon the perceived consequences.

**Lying**

*Arguments against lying*

1. Dupes and deprives others
2. Causes distrust in human relationships
3. The Domino argument
4. Unfair advantage or power for liars
5. Self-destructiveness of lying
6. Effect of lying on society

*Arguments for lying*

1. Defense of the innocent, including self-defense
2. National security
3. Trade secrets in business
4. “Little white lies”

**Moderate position**

1. Lying only acceptable to save life or as last resort
2. How you tell the truth – different ways of telling truth

**Cheating**

*Arguments against*

1. Unfair and unjust to others
2. Falsified qualifications
3. Effects on the cheater
Arguments for cheating
1. Surviving and winning
2. Everybody does it
3. As long as you don’t get caught

Breaking promises
Implies certain agreements

1. Breaking promises is a form of dishonesty
2. A person’s word as an indication of person’s integrity and reputation

Arguments against breaking promises
1. Destruction of personal relationships
2. Domino theory
3. Effects on people’s life choices
4. Destruction of general social trust
5. Loss of personal integrity

Arguments for breaking promises
1. Changed circumstances
2. When there are moral conflicts
3. When it’s a trivial issue
4. Where unusual situations justify it
5. No promise is sacred

Stealing
Arguments against stealing
1. Property rights
2. Breakdown of trust
3. Invasion of privacy
4. Domino argument
5. Material losses to victim
6. Effect on thief
7. Overall effect on society

Arguments for stealing
1. Corrupt economic system
2. Crucial emergency situation
3. Thrills and adventure
4. From institutions and organizations
5. As long as you don’t get caught
6. Military and government secrets