

Is Honesty a Virtue?

I have been thinking about honesty in the philosophical/psychological sense recently. I think there are a lot of false virtues that initially and intuitively seem correct, but often distract from greater issues. I tend to view honesty in this category.

I have been dishonest in many realms in past relationships, and I have been very honest in more recent relationships. The irony about this is ... in the past I used to find honesty a virtue, while more recently I haven't.

Everyone desires human connection, and we are able to get a higher quality connection the more honest we are. So, it seems insane that people would desire to lie to anyone they would have a relationship with. Sure, people who want to use people to get something in the short run would be incentivized to lie, but why would someone lie to someone they desire to have a long term relationship with?

The first question to ask in delving deeper is, fairly obvious, why do people lie in relationships? Are we so cynical to think that everyone just wants to manipulate and control people? I don't think it is that simple, but there is a small kernel of truth here.

Reason 1 - Shame

When we can't accept something about ourselves, it is impossible to believe that others can accept those things about us.

I used to believe that I had weird sexual desires. The world told me in a million different ways that I was freaking weird, and should be ashamed of myself. I heard it from religion, teachers, parents, etc. I was indirectly told that my sexuality was predatory, and I believed them. Of course, when I got older and discussed the topic with other guys and girls I realized that I was pretty freaking "Plain Jane" in my sexual desires. I also learned that almost everyone had similar shame regarding sexual desires.

Due to all of this I lied to my earlier girlfriends about my sexual desires. I couldn't accept these things about myself, so I figured, how can they accept these things about me? For me to open up about these sexual desires I have to expect that they will be okay with something that I wasn't even okay with about myself.

Was I a bad guy for being dishonest? No ... I just lived in a horrible system that shamed me from a young age.

While sexuality is often a big reason for lying, there are many other things also... however, this is usually the best example since most people can easily relate.

Reason 2 - Intolerance from Others

Even if someone is able to accept something about themselves ... that doesn't mean that he will believe the world will tolerate that about him, or specifically, a friend or girlfriend.

To this day I am only selectively honest with people. This is why I have regularly cut my Facebook friends down. I surround myself with people who offer me empathy and root for my success. However, many people haven't found the ability to surround themselves with empathetic people for a myriad of reasons.

Lets say you are a gay guy in rural Alabama. You might have come to terms with your sexual orientation ... but it is probably a good idea to lie to people about it. (It is also probably a good idea to move to somewhere else when you can). The same thing goes in a romantic relationship ... a guy might be okay with his desire to masturbate thinking about having sex with multiple elderly women (random example) ... However, he might not be able to perceive that his girlfriend would be empathetic and understanding of it. He might end up having to lie to his girlfriend about why he has a boner when they went to help out at the old folks home on Jello Wrestling night.

Some people might say that this guy needs to be honest anyway! He is being a liar! He should be honest and maybe just find the people that are right for him. To me, this sounds a bit Utopian.

There are many people in the world who are controlling jerks. As an individual I need to navigate through the world of controlling asses to find happiness with people I choose to associate with. Selectively giving accurate and inaccurate information will help defend against being attacked or targeted by people who wish to hurt you. Next, many people don't believe they can find understanding from others. There aren't many girls out there admitting to being sexually turned on to the concept of rape in certain moods, and so the girl who is honest about it will feel like everyone will see her as a whore with no self-respect. So they wont articulate why they have damp underwear while reading *The Fountainhead*, "Ohh, ummmmm, I think I just accidentally peed a little Yeah."

Living in the world we live in most people feel alone around people, and they don't think other people will understand. The reason for this is that people hear from controlling people vastly more than from people willing to be vulnerable and to offer empathy. So many people are left with their perceived dilemma ... honesty and loneliness, or dishonesty and companionship? While I think this is a false dilemma, I think it is reasonable conclusion given the evidence.

Reason 3 - Blatant Manipulation

This one is the one that people most often figure people lie, to be a controlling dick.

However, in relationships, I tend to find it is rare.

While there is an argument to be made that lying for the other two reasons is manipulative, it doesn't have the same intent as someone who is just trying to manipulate people into getting something out of them.

There are people who will say anything to get what they want with no regard to another person's feelings or thoughts. If you date a person like this, there isn't much to be said for you. You likely lack any self-esteem and have no trust in your judging abilities. We all run into people like this (car salesmen, lawyer, hobo, etc), but very few of us want to date these kinds of people.

Conclusions

I don't think honesty is a virtue. It is a condition that emerges out of empathy for one's self, and out of empathy for others. There is no way to have it otherwise, to try to force it is impossible, and will merely spurn a list of unintended consequences. If you want a friend or partner to be honest with you ... make sure they are incentivized to by being empathetic, accepting, and friendly about the "weird" stuff that will pop up.

If you want someone to be honest, but you want to remain a condemning asshole ... fuck you ... you merely want people to be honest as a tool to further control them. You are the reason so many people lie.