

‘Anyway,’ (he continued) ‘because you distracted me with all these arguments, I never actually got round to going back to shut the front door properly behind me, to stop my parents noticing I’d been out — and now I think I hear them coming in. Since you say there’s no important moral distinction between equivocating, deceiving and lying, and since you’re such an adroit Professor of Lying — when they ask you if I’ve been out, would you mind just telling them a straight lie, please?’

I am indebted to master Philip Moody, currently a pupil at Stewart-Melville’s School, Edinburgh, for an argument we had on the evening of Thursday, January 9th, 1992.

On being cunning as snakes Matthew X 16: a rejoinder.

The doctrine that lying is always wrong (often, of course, only venially wrong) has been defended at length by many authors who ought to be taken seriously: in the Catechism of the Council of Trent, and in the writings of the Doctors of the Church, e.g. Augustine, Aquinas, and Alphonsus de Liguori. Mr. Chappell, maintaining the contrary thesis, presents to his readers none of this literature, not even by allusion; the nearest he comes to that is a reference to what is ‘associated with the Jesuits’. The voice we hear *against lying* is that of an imaginary nasty boy called Philip.

Mr. Chappell also alludes to my book *The Virtues*. The views and arguments of ‘Philip’ are not ascribable to me; anybody curious about what I say should read my book; if someone does that and still cannot see any significant difference between ‘Philip’s’ view of the matter and mine, nothing I could say now is likely to do him any good.

‘Philip’ and his creator both reason in a recognisably ‘consequentialist’ style: we get drearily familiar arguments and examples. But *nobody* has a right to treat consequentialist moral thinking as unanswerably sound, thus ignoring the anti-consequentialist writing not only of Catholics but of non-Christians such as Philippa Foot, Arthur Prior, and Bernard Williams. Mr. Chappell likewise fails to mention the refutation of consequentialist thought in the chapter of my book (‘Prudence’) devoted to that.

Peter Geach