

Review of Socratic Dialogue

Saturday 12 November 2022 at Lancaster Hotel



Julie Marie welcomed all to this short Socratic Dialogue, which would be followed by a review of this form of dialogue and how it may fit in to the future direction of SFCP in the UK. We had a healthy mix of vintage, middle and new members, with two people coming for the first time, and some from the last century.

Sarah Banks facilitated the dialogue. She reminded us of the core principles: to call from the concrete, to leave outside the outside authorities and mine the rich

experience we all had, and not to look to her for the answers as she would purely facilitate our investigation.

Subject: When is it right to lie? A Socratic Dialogue in a 'post-truth' era

The debate about when, if ever, it is morally justifiable to lie is a perennial one in everyday, professional and public life and in academic and popular literature. It raises issues about the nature of 'truth' and 'falsehood', intentionality, moral integrity and the functioning and sustainability of legal and social institutions. This question seems even more challenging in the so-called 'post-truth' era, which calls more strongly into question what counts as 'lying' and the extent to which lies are regarded as wrong or generally to be avoided. Is there a difference between 'fact' and 'fabrication'? What is 'truth' and does it matter? Is being 'economical with the truth' the same as lying?





Examples ranged from when it was not right to lie to when it was ambiguously right to lie, to if it was actually a lie. An example was chosen to focus on, rich in potential avenues of investigation.

Brief synopsis: Within an hierarchal organisation, a person, Z, asked a head of unit, M, in a meeting with other junior staff, if it was true that heads of other units (X and Y) were dissatisfied with the quality of Z's work. Z was agitated. M lied saying she did not know. M was not her line manager.

M, the example-giver, judged that:

In this case I felt it was right to lie because if I had not lied it would have made the situation much worse, made Z more agitated causing emotional escalation and real political issues between senior managers. That would have been evident in front of more junior members of staff.

Although no firm conclusion was reached in this individual instance, we found the following common denominators:

We found minimising harm as a justification for lying, harm to Z, X & Y and others, including M herself, the organisation and other staff members.

Acting within the constraints of the organisation and its structure and procedures, M was right to lie to protect others and herself.

Later reflection outside the Clarendon Arms public house, we explored two other ideas: the life of a lie, and how it often catches up with us. The inevitable separation that a lie creates (the example was a person complementing her partner's white trousers, how good they looked in them, wanting to bolster their confidence, but not actually



thinking white trousers did look good on them). However trivial and benign this example is, it potentially precipitates a separation between the two people.

We also discussed the lie of the psychopath and/or narcissist (eg Donald Trump or Boris Johnson) and why it did not matter to some people that these people lied, and yet to us, it was critical.

Discussion on the short form of Dialogue

The short dialogue worked for people with busy lives who could spare a day but not a weekend. One wanted the dialogue to extend into this discussion time! Some people liked a weekend, as it gave a night to let the ideas settle, and a longer time to investigate deeper.

November 2022

Rachel Kellett (SFCP Administrator)