



# PHILOSOPHY

department

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**“Truthfulness and Sense-making: Two Modes of Respect for Agency”**  
(co-authored with Steve Matthews)

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**FRIDAY, December 4, 2020**

**4:00 – 6:00 PM**

VIRTUAL TALK.

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Carers of people with dementia are often faced with a morally troubling choice over whether to be truthful to those in their care. Surveyed care-workers report with near unanimity that they have deceived or lied to those in their care, typically in order to alleviate the person’s agitation or confusion. While the decision to deceive is usually motivated by beneficence, the concern remains that this practice betrays a lack of respect for the person deceived, or shielded from the truth. Family members in particular may worry that the pretences sometimes engaged in patronize their loved one.

The case of dementia exposes an interesting fault line between two grounds or modes of respect for persons which is the primary focus of this paper. We set out an argument that respect for agency also requires support for the sense-making capacities of agents. We describe the concept of sense-making, its link to self-image, its centrality in diachronic agency, and the ways in which we facilitate each other’s sense-making in interpersonal relationships. We then trace the importance of truthfulness for the sense-making project, and, through a series of cases explore why and when divergences from being wholly truthful might be morally justified on grounds of respect for agency. Finally, we return to the case of dementia and reframe the dilemma with which we began.

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