LYING AND PUBLIC POLICY: PP 474:001
Winter 2020
M/W 1:00 – 2:20

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Mon: 2:30 – 3:30
Wed: 11:00 – 12:00

Introduction
Lying has been getting a lot of attention lately and for good reason. Democracies demand the truthful exchange of information between rulers and the ruled—as well as a healthy media to inform the public on matters related to government and policy. Lying therefore poses a legitimate threat to the political stability of our nation. And yet despite the current ubiquity of terms like ‘post-truth’ and ‘alternative facts,’ lying is not a twenty-first century cultural or political aberration—lying permeates the fabric not only of American society but every society, playing a significant role in our daily conversations with others and with ourselves. As abundant research has shown, we lie daily—to avoid social embarrassment or hurting others’ feelings, or to manipulate situations for our own gain. Moreover, political philosophers like Plato have argued that lying is an essential tactic in the ruler’s toolkit, used to preserve social cohesion or persuade the public to agree with a policy that, in the ruler’s opinion, may be for the social good. Lying can also be necessary to protect the oppressed from exploitation or abuse. In this values and ethics course, we will read broadly in literature, philosophy, history, and politics in order, first, to define the different forms of deception, then to understand how various ethical frameworks may help us to determine when (if ever) lying is justified. Then we will apply these lessons to examine important policy topics of our own era, including nationalistic myths, passing, propaganda, Russian election interference, fake news, and the extent to which lying compromises government services such as education, voting, and the police.

Required Texts
Sissela Bok, Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life
George Orwell, 1984
Nella Larsen, Passing

Grading
• Class attendance and participation, quizzes 20%
• Policy memo 20%
• Group Project 60%
  ➢ Individual paper [inventing a political lie] 15%
  ➢ Individual paper [political strategy] 15%
  ➢ Twitter war 5%
  ➢ Group presentation 10%
  ➢ Final group paper 15%
Attendance and Participation
Although I will lecture on occasion, this will predominately be a discussion-based class. That is, I place a premium on your honest contributions to our conversations about dishonesty. Note, however, that I’ll be judging you on the quality of your comments, as much if not more than the quantity. You don’t have to be brilliant, just thoughtful.

Needless to say, you need to be here in order to participate. More than two unexcused absences will lower your grade. Three or more unexcused absences may result in failure or a request that you withdraw from the course. Excused absence means illness or a death in the family. You don’t need to provide me with a note from a doctor or relevant authority, because, contrary to the prevailing spirit of this class, I trust you. (Besides, why ask for a note when it could very well be forged?) If you know you’re going to miss, let me know ahead of time, otherwise, contact me as soon as possible.

Electronic Devices
No smart phones. Laptops are allowed only to refer to course reading materials (if you prefer not to print). However, note-taking should be done by hand—as the research shows, you’ll learn more this way (look it up).

Quizzes
I reserve the right to administer quizzes, a harsh medicine, but one necessary to insure against the disease of non-reading. These will work in the following way: at the beginning of class, I will ask you to take a few minutes to write a short answer to a question pertaining to the assigned reading. These will be graded on a check-plus, check, check-minus scale, and will contribute to your class participation grade.

Ford School Inclusivity Statement
Members of the Ford School community represent a rich variety of backgrounds and perspectives. We are committed to providing an atmosphere for learning that respects diversity. While working together to build this community we ask all members to:

- share your unique experiences, values and beliefs
- be open to the views of others
- honor the uniqueness of your colleagues
- appreciate the opportunity that we have to learn from each other
- value one another’s opinions and communicate in a respectful manner
- keep confidential discussions that the community has of a personal (or professional) nature
- use this opportunity together to discuss ways in which we can create an inclusive environment in Ford classes and across the UM community.
Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
If you believe you need an accommodation for a disability, please let me know at your earliest convenience. Some aspects of the course may be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. As soon as you make me aware of your needs, I can work with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office to help determine appropriate academic accommodations. Any information you provide will be treated as private and confidential.

Student Mental Health and Well-Being Resources
The University of Michigan is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. We acknowledge that a variety of issues, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, and depression, directly impacts students’ academic performance. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. For help, contact Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) and/or University Health Service (UHS). For a listing of other mental health resources available on and off campus, visit: http://umich.edu/~mhealth/

A Note on Plagiarism
This is a course in which we will not only be learning about dishonesty, but practicing it as well, as we study and imitate the strategic deceitfulness of our nation’s leaders and punditry. Therefore, you might get the idea that practicing the form of academic dishonesty known as plagiarism might be condoned in this course because, hey, it’s all in the name of learning, right?

Allow me to suggest a better way of looking at it. I’ve been studying dishonesty—and how to spot it—quite a bit of late. Don’t test me. A student who plagiarizes will automatically receive an “E” for the course, in addition to any actions taken by the appropriate university committee. Please refer to: http://fordschool.umich.edu/academics/expectations and http://www.rackham.umich.edu/current-students/policies/academic-policies/section11#112.

A Note on the Writing Center
As I will continue to offer tutorial hours at the Ford School Writing Center through the Winter term, I am happy, during my regular scheduled Writing Center hours, to read your work—except your work for this course. If you would like the Writing Center to read your papers for this course, please make an appointment with the other Writing Center instructors, Molly Spencer or Beth Chimera. If you would like to discuss your work for this course with me, please come see me during my course office hours or contact me for an appointment. I won’t read a complete draft of your paper, but I will read outlines and selected paragraphs, or discuss your ideas. To make an appointment with Molly or Beth (which I strongly recommend): http://www.fordschool.umich.edu/writing-center/
PHILOSOPHICAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL/BIOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 8
Introduction: the liar as trickster/rebel/cultural icon
Adam and Eve; Jacob and Esau; Odysseus, Brer Rabbit, et al.

MONDAY, JANUARY 13
Is lying inevitable/unavoidable? Are we all natural-born liars?
- David Livingstone Smith, Why We Lie, chapter 2, pp. 29 – 49
- Martin Jay, The Virtues of Mendacity, excerpt from chapter 1, pp. 19 - 46

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15
What are the different types of dishonesty? What is the difference between a lie and a falsehood?

MONDAY, JANUARY 20
No Class: MLK Day

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 22
What are the motives/justifications for lying? The Deontological Perspective

Extra (voluntary) reading:

MONDAY, JANUARY 27
What are the motives/justifications for lying? The Utilitarian Perspective
- John Stuart Mill, excerpt from “Utilitarianism,” Chapter 2
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29
What are the motives/justifications for lying? The Extramoral [Amoral] Perspective
• Peter Pomerantsev, Nothing is True and Everything is Possible, “Reality Show Russia,” pp. 35 – 76; and “Forms of Delirium,” pp. 228 – 239

Extra (voluntary) reading:
• Nietzsche, excerpts from The Will to Power, pp. 146 – 169.

LYING AND THE SELF
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3
On Passing: When do external [social/systemic] pressures justify presenting yourself as someone else?
• Nella Larsen, Passing
• [Memo-writing exercise]

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5
Self-deception: Is it possible to deceive ourselves? How and why do we do it?
• Dan Ariely, chapter 6, “Cheating Ourselves” and chapter 7, “Creativity and Dishonesty: We are all Storytellers,” from The (Honest) Truth about Dishonesty, pp 141 – 189

LYING AND POLITICS
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 10
Why do politicians lie? Is the practice of politics inherently dishonest?
• Hannah Arendt, “Truth in Politics”
• Plato, “The Noble Lie” from The Republic

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12
The Fantasy of the Truthful [Authentic] Politician
• Robert Penn Warren, All the King’s Men excerpt, “Willie Stark Tells It Like It Is,” pp 68 - 98
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 17

National identity, myth making, and hero worship


WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 19

Vladimir Putin: Master of “Implausible Deniability”


Extra (voluntary) reading:

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24

The lie deployed as political weapon, part one—case study: Russia, the CIA, and the origins of the AIDS epidemic


WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 26

The lie deployed as political weapon, part two—case study: “Death Panels”

- Regina Lawrence and Matthew Schafer, “Sarah Palin’s 2009 ‘death panel’ claims: How the media handled them, and why that matters,” Nieman Lab.org
WINTER BREAK

MONDAY, MARCH 9
The lie deployed as political weapon, part three—Fake News

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11
What are the most effective methods for debunking political misinformation? Why do debunking attempts often fail—or backfire?
- Brendan Nyhan, Ethan Porter, Jason Reifler, Thomas J. Wood, “Taking Corrections Literally but Not Seriously? The Effects of Information on Factual Beliefs and Candidate Favorability”

MONDAY, MARCH 16
Lying and the Presidency, part one
- https://politics.thelonion.com/report-presidents-washington-through-bush-may-have-lie-181956677
- George W. Bush and the Iraq War—Chapter 8, “Selling the War in Iraq” and Chapter 9, “Revising the Record on Iraq” from Ben Fritz, Bryan Keefer, and Brendan Nyhan, All the President’s Spin, pp. 143–217.
- Christopher Hitchens and George Galloway, “The War Over the Iraq War,” Foreign Policy, September 26, 2005.
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18
Lying and the Presidency, part two: How do President Trump’s lies differ from those of previous presidents? What is the source of their appeal?

- Harry Frankfurt, *On Bullshit*
- Daniel Dale, “815 false claims: The staggering scale of Donald Trump’s pre-midterm dishonesty,” *Toronto Star*, November 15, 2018

LYING AND POLICY
MONDAY, MARCH 23
Playing the Con Game

- WATCH: (half the class) *The Inventor: Out for Blood in Silicon Valley* (HBO documentary on Elizabeth Holmes and Theranos)
- WATCH: (other half of the class) *Fyre Fraud* (Hulu documentary on Billy McFarland and the Fyre Festival)

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25
Lying and the Police, part one

  - Part one: “Testifying by Police: A Stubborn Problem”
  - Part two: “Promotions, not Punishments, for Officers Accused of Lying”
  - Part three: “Testifying Remains a Stubborn Problem. Here’s How the System Could Reduce It”

MONDAY, MARCH 30
Lying and the Police, part two: “The bigger the lie, the more they believe.”

- Watch: *The Wire*, season five:
  - episode two, “Unconfirmed Reports”
  - episode three, “Not for Attribution”
  - episode six, “The Dickensian Aspect”
  - episode seven, “Took”
  - episode ten, “—30—”
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1

Juking the stats

- *The Atlanta-Journal Constitution's* “Cheating Our Children” series
  - Part one: Suspicious scores across the nation
  - Part two: Suspect scores at premier schools
  - Part three: Help on tests can cross the line
  - Part four: Cheating thrives, investigations languish
  - Part Five: States can't ensure test integrity

MONDAY, APRIL 6

Lying and Revolution

- Rigoberta Menchu, excerpts from *I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*
- Various authors to be determined

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8

Case Study: Voting Fraud (and Election Fraud) in Alabama and North Carolina


MONDAY, APRIL 13

*Why and how do governments lie? What are the uses of political lying and what are the effects on the populace? Just how bad can it get anyway?*

- George Orwell, *1984*, part one

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15 and MONDAY, APRIL 20

*Group projects*