LYING AND PUBLIC POLICY: PP 474:001
Winter 2019
M/W 1:00 – 2:20

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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 and, most notoriously, Machiavelli, 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—and we’ll watch a few films and TV shows as well—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 entitlement programs, voting, and the police.

Required Texts
Sissela Bok, Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life
George Orwell, 1984
Martin Jay, The Virtues of Mendacity
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 9
Introduction: the liar as trickster/rebel/cultural icon
Adam and Eve; Jacob and Esau; Odysseus, Brer Rabbit, et al.

MONDAY, JANUARY 14
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 16
What are the different types of dishonesty? What is the difference between a lie and a falsehood?
• Thomas L. Carson, Lying and Deception: Theory and Practice, chapter 1, “Lying,” pp. 15 – 45

MONDAY, JANUARY 21
No Class: MLK Day

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 23
What are the motives/justifications for lying? The Deontological Perspective
• Immanuel Kant, “On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives,” excerpted in Bok, Lying, pp. 267 - 272
• Sissela Bok, Lying, chapter 2, “Truthfulness, Deceit, and Trust” and chapter 3, “Never to Lie?” pp. 17 – 46

MONDAY, JANUARY 28
What are the motives/justifications for lying? The Utilitarian Perspective
• Sissela Bok, Lying, chapter 4, “Weighing the Consequences,” pp. 47 – 56
• Jeremy Bentham, excerpt from An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, Chapters 1 - 5 (skip Preface)(ignore the long footnote pp. 13-14)
• John Stuart Mill, excerpt from “Utilitarianism,” Chapter 2
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 30

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

LYING AND THE SELF
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4

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

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 6

On Passing: When do external [social/systemic] pressures justify presenting yourself as someone else?

- Nella Larsen, *Passing*
- Memo-writing discussion

LYING AND POLITICS
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 11

The Fantasy of the Truthful [Authentic] Politician


WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 13

National identity, myth making, and hero worship: “The ink of political fiction is blood.”

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 18

Why do politicians lie? Is the practice of politics inherently dishonest?

- Hannah Arendt, “Truth in Politics”
- Plato, “The Noble Lie” from The Republic
- Martin Jay, The Virtues of Mendacity, excerpts from chapter 3: 147 – 156; 175 - 180

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 20

The Politician as Real-politic Exploiter of Human Gullibility

- Machiavelli, The Prince: (approximately 27 pp)
  - Chapter 7, “Of new principalities acquired with the arms of others and by Fortune”
  - Chapter 8, “Of those who have become princes through wickedness”
  - Chapter 15, “Of those things for which men, and particularly princes, are praised or blamed”
  - Chapter 18, “How a prince should keep his word”
  - Chapter 19, “Of avoiding being despised and hated”
  - Chapter 23, “Of how to avoid flatterers”
- Timothy Snyder, The Road to Unfreedom, chapter five, “Truth or Lies,” pp 159 - 215

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 25

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


WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 27

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 11
*The lie deployed as political weapon, part three—Fake News*
• Benedict Carey, “How Fiction Becomes Fact on Social Media,” *New York Times*, October 20, 2017
• Renee DiResta, et al., “The Tactics & Tropes of the Internet Research Agency,” a report on Russian interference in the US 2016 election by New Knowledge, the Tow Center for Digital Journalism, and Canfield Research

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13
*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”
• Murat Yukselif and Tamsin McMahon, “The Long Road to Fixing Facebook,” *The Globe and Mail*, March 9, 2018

MONDAY, MARCH 18
*Lying and the Presidency, part one: case studies [readings for each group TBD]*
• Group one: George W. Bush and the case for the Iraq War
• Group two: Ronald Reagan and the Iran-Contra Affaire
• Group three: Lyndon Johnson and the Gulf of Tonkin Incidents

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20

*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

MONDAY, MARCH 25

*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

LYING AND POLICY
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27

*Juking the stats*

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

MONDAY, APRIL 1

*What is the difference between “framing” and “spin”? When can rhetorical strategies be considered cunningly effective and when do they devolve into dishonesty?*

• Case study: Wind energy in Michigan
• Readings TBD
• guest speaker: Sarah Mills, Senior Project Manager at the Ford School’s Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3

_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: “Testlying Remains a Stubborn Problem. Here’s How the System Could Reduce It”

MONDAY, APRIL 8

_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 10

_Case Study: Voting Fraud in Georgia and North Carolina_

- Readings TBD

MONDAY, APRIL 15

_If all the world is populated by liars, and we must train ourselves to be skeptical consumers of information, how do we prevent ourselves from becoming overwhelmingly cynical? Is there room left for wonder?_

- I.B. Singer, “Gimpel the Fool,” from _Gimpel the Fool and other stories_
- Nate Staniforth, _Here is Real Magic_, pp. 1 – 23 and pp. 58 - 93

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17

_Group projects_

MONDAY, APRIL 22

_Group projects_