

LYING AND PUBLIC POLICY: PP 474:001

Winter 2019

M/W 1:00 – 2:20

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M/W 2:30 – 3:30

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] 10%
 - Individual paper [stakeholder analysis] 10%
 - Individual assignment [presentation scripts] 10%

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| ➤ 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
- Dan Ariely, *The (Honest) Truth about Dishonesty*, Introduction and chapter 1, “Testing the Simple Model of Rational Crime (SMORC),” pp. 1 - 29

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 16

What are the different types of dishonesty? What is the difference between a lie and a falsehood?

- Sissela Bok, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*, Preface to the 1999 edition, Introduction, pp xxvii -xxxiv and chapter one, pp 3-16
- 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
- Thomas L. Carson, *Lying and Deception: Theory and Practice*, chapter 3, “Kant and the Absolute Prohibition against Lying,” pp. 67 – 88

MONDAY, JANUARY 28

What are the motives/justifications for lying? The Utilitarian Perspective

- Sissela Bok, *Lying*, chapter 4, “Weighing the Consequences,” pp. 47 – 56
- John Stuart Mill, “Utilitarianism,” from *Ethics: Selections from Classical and Contemporary Writers*, pp. 232 - 259

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 30

What are the motives/justifications for lying? The Extramoral [Amoral] Perspective

- Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense” from *The Portable Nietzsche*, pp. 42 - 47; excerpts from *The Will to Power*, pp. 146 - 169
- Peter Pomerantsev, *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible*, “Reality Show Russia,” pp. 3 – 8; 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?

- Evelin Sullivan, “Deep Down, I Knew....,” from *The Concise Book of Lying*, pp. 162 – 186
- 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
- Listen: “Loving the Lie” episode from *The Hidden Brain* podcast

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 6

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

- Nella Larsen, *Passing*

LYING AND POLITICS

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 11

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
- David Foster Wallace, “The Weasel, Twelve Monkeys, and the Shrub” (aboard the ‘Straight Talk Express’ with John McCain), *Rolling Stone*, April 13, 2000. <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/david-foster-wallace-on-john-mccain-the-weasel-twelve-monkeys-and-the-shrub-194272/>
- Laura Miller, “The ‘Real’ McCain,” *Slate*, August 27, 2018. <https://slate.com/culture/2018/08/david-foster-wallaces-john-mccain-essay-revealed-the-limits-of-dfws-worldview.html>

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 13

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

- James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, chapter 1, “Handicapped by History: The Process of Hero-making,” pp. 11 – 30; and chapter 2, “1493: The True Importance of Christopher Columbus,” pp. 31 – 69.

- Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom*, chapter two, “Succession or Failure,” pp 37 – 66.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 18

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

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 20

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

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 25

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

- Adam B. Ellick and Adam Westbrook, “Operation Infektion: Russian Disinformation: From Cold War to Kanye,” *New York Times*, November 12, 2018
- Erhard Geissler and Robert Hunt Sprinkle, “Disinformation Squared: Was the HIV-from-Fort-Detrick myth a Stasi success?” *Politics and the Life Sciences*, Vol. 32, No. 2, Fall 2013.
- Thomas Boghardt, “Soviet Bloc Intelligence and its AIDS Disinformation Campaign,” *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. 53, No. 4, Dec. 2009

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 27

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

- Betsy McCaughey, “GovernmentCare’s Assault on Seniors.” *Wall Street Journal*, July 23, 2009.
- Catherine Richert, “McCaughey claims end-of-life counseling will be required for Medicare patients,” *Politifact*, July 23, 2009.

- Brendan Nyhan, “Why the Death Panel Myth Wouldn’t Die: Misinformation in the Health Care Reform Debate,” *The Forum*, Vol. 8, Issue 1, 2010
- David M. Frankford, “The Remarkable Staying Power of Death Panels,” *Journal of Health Politics, Policy, and Law*, Vol. 40, No. 5, October 2015
- Regina Lawrence and Matthew Schafer, “Sarah Palin’s 2009 ‘death panel’ claims: How the media handled them, and why that matters,” Nieman Lab.org
- Atul Gawande, “Letting Go: What Should Medicine Do When It Can’t Save Your Life?” *New Yorker*, August 2, 2010

WINTER BREAK

MONDAY, MARCH 11

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

- Dean Jackson, “The ‘Demand Side’ of the Disinformation Crisis” from The National Endowment for Democracy, August 2, 2018, <https://www.ned.org/issue-brief-the-demand-side-of-the-disinformation-crisis/>
- Benedict Carey, “How Fiction Becomes Fact on Social Media,” *New York Times*, October 20, 2017
- Robinson Meyer, “The Grim Conclusions of the Largest-Ever Study of Fake News,” *The Atlantic*, March 8, 2018
- 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”
- John Cook and Stephan Lewandowsky, “The Debunking Handbook,” St. Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland, January 23, 2012
- Daniel Engber, “LOL Something Matters,” *Slate* online, January 3, 2018. <https://slate.com/health-and-science/2018/01/weve-been-told-were-living-in-a-post-truth-age-dont-believe-it.html>
- Factcheck.org: “How to Spot Fake News”: <https://www.factcheck.org/2016/11/how-to-spot-fake-news/>
- 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 Affair
- 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*
- Oliver Hahl, Minjae Kim, and Ezra W. Zuckerman Sivan, "The Authentic Appeal of the Lying Demagogue: Proclaiming the Deeper Truth about Political Illegitimacy," *American Sociological Review*
- 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

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

MONDAY, APRIL 1

Juking the stats

- Linda Darling-Hammond, "Performance-Based Assessment and Education Equity." In the *Harvard Educational Review*, Spring 1994.
- Trip Gabriel, "Under Pressure, Teachers Tamper With Tests." *The New York Times*, June 10, 2010.
http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/11/education/11cheat.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0
- *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

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3

Lying and the Police, part one

- Fred E. Inbau, *Criminal Interrogation and Confessions*, pp. 68 – 76 and pp. 92 – 127
- Joseph Goldstein, “He Excelled as a Detective, Until Prosecutors Stopped Believing Him,” *New York Times*, October 10, 2017
- *The New York Times* “Blue Lies” series, by Joseph Goldstein
 - Part one: Testilying by Police: A Stubborn Problem
 - Part two: Promotions, not Punishments, for Officers Accused of Lying
 - Part three: Testilying 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
- Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World*, chapter 17, “The Marriage of Skepticism and Wonder,” pp. 293 – 306.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17

Group projects

MONDAY, APRIL 22

Group projects