



UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
FACULTY OF ARTS
Department of Philosophy

PHIL. 399.21, Lecture 03, Spring 2022 (Asynchronous)
Topics in Philosophy: Lies, Bullshit, and Shared Reality

COURSE DETAILS and WEEKLY SYLLABUS

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The University of Calgary resides upon the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprising the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations). The City of Calgary is also home to Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III. The University of Calgary is situated on land adjacent to where the Bow River meets the Elbow River; the traditional Blackfoot name of this place is “Moh'kins'tsis”, which we now call the City of Calgary.

ii' taa'poh'to'p, the Blackfoot name of the University of Calgary's [Indigenous Strategy](#), was bestowed and transferred in ceremony by Kainai Elder Andy Black Water on June 21, 2017. The name signifies a place to rejuvenate and re-energize while on a journey. Traditionally, these places are recognized as safe, caring, restful – and offer renewed energy for an impending journey. In a traditional naming ceremony, transitioning into the new name is a journey of transformation towards self-actualization.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

“Bullshit” is a popular term of disapprobation that gets thrown around a lot in modern culture. In recent years, it has been subjected to some quite interesting conceptual analysis by professional philosophers, psychologists, economists, and others. The aim of this class is to define this term (using an analysis offered by philosopher Harry Frankfurt) in ways that render its referent clearer, and then practice some detection and correction skills that are likely to emerge from such clarification.

PREREQUISITE(S)

There are no pre-requisites for this course.

COURSE OBJECTIVES/LEARNING OUTCOMES

Our learning objectives are straightforward. After taking the course, you should be able to:

- Have working definitions of “bullshit” that allows us to distinguish between it and other concepts (such as “lie”).
- Figure out for ourselves precisely why particular samples of bullshit qualify as bullshit.
- Be able to call out bullshitters in substantive and effective ways.
- Look at several types of bullshit involving the internet, media culture, and graphic presentation.
- Examine the idea and importance of a shared common social reality.

Activities will include one exam MC/TF exam, one short essay exam, six discussion assignments in which they must interact with both the instructor and each other (five

REQUIRED/RECOMMENDED TEXTBOOKS, READINGS AND MATERIALS

In an effort to keep costs as low as possible, I am asking you to buy only two short books: (1) Harry Frankfurt’s *On Bullshit* (Princeton University Press, 2005) ISBN:9780691122946 (2) Harry Frankfurt’s *On Truth*. (Knopf, 2006) ISBN:978-0307264220 (physical copies cost about \$12 and Kindle editions cost about \$8). Physical copies and Kindle editions of each of these two texts cost about ten bucks apiece. There are other reading materials I will have you consult (and various videos I will require or recommend that you watch). However, these are public domain and free of charge to the student.

COURSE ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Assessment Components and Grading Schemes

- Activities will include two short essay exams and 6 discussion assignments in which they must interact with both the instructor and each other.
- If applicable, the letter grade conversion scale.
- Each of the following will count for ¼ of the course grade: Discussion assignments (taken collectively), Quizzes (taken collectively), Exam #1 (MC, TF format), Exam #2 (Short Essay format). This setup is intended to accommodate different students who do best at different kinds of graded work. All work will be submitted through D2L. This setup is intended to accommodate different students who do best at different kinds of graded work. All work will be submitted through D2L.

- Each of the above four graded components of the course is necessary to pass the course as a whole. This means that you must do all the discussions, take all the quizzes, and take both exams to pass.
- The course is self-paced. Thus, submission of “late” work is not strictly an issue. However, I recommend due date guidelines for students to follow. The idea here is to give students some leeway to help them handle non-academic responsibilities (e.g., work, family), while encouraging them not to fall too far behind.
- Participation is indirectly measured by students’ participation in the discussion assignments (and thus counts as 25% of the course grade).
- Prior to the withdraw deadline, students must have received: grades for a minimum 30% of the course grade OR (for non-graded courses) formal feedback based on their performance in the course.

Exams

- There are two Exams in this class. Only the second is comprehensive. However, it is worth 25% of the course grade, just like the first.
- Exams are open-book and open-note.

SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Each week-long module will explore one or other of these three concepts and ways to combat the phenomena to which they refer. Required readings and viewings. (I also recommend appropriate multimedia resources whenever I can find them.) Supplemental readings and viewings are also cited to benefit those who wish to delve further.

Modules

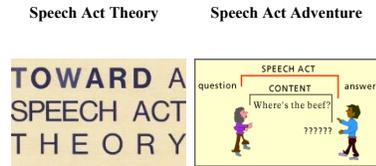
Week 1: Introduction, Philosophical Method, and Speech Act Theory (Mon., May 2 - Sun. May 8)

Required

- Read selection from A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*.
- Read [J. L. Austin](#) “Performative Utterance,” in Readings folder and at [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/viewer.html?pdfurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.uvm.edu%2F~lдеросse%2Fcourses%2Flang%2FAustin\(1979\).pdf&cLen=1315273&chunk=true](https://chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/viewer.html?pdfurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.uvm.edu%2F~lдеросse%2Fcourses%2Flang%2FAustin(1979).pdf&cLen=1315273&chunk=true)
- Listen to PowerPoint #1.
- Listen to PowerPoint #2.
- Listen to PowerPoint #3.
- Discussion Assignment #1 (one original post and at least two responses to the posts of others)
- QUIZ #1

Supplemental

I find these to be helpful video summaries of speech act theory (linked to the images below):



If you have any interest, you can listen to Austin explain his own theory and take questions concerning it at the following two sites (linked to the images below).

Lecture 1 Lecture 2



Note that these two lecture presentations are very lengthy, very dry, and very British. Getting through them can require lots and lots of caffeine.

Week 2: Lies and Bullshit (Mon., May 9 – Sun., May 15)

Required

- Read selection from *De Mendacio* (On lying) by St. Aurelius Augustinus, bishop of Hippo.
- Read *On Bullshit* by Harry Frankfurt (in (1986) *On Bullshit*. *Raritan Quarterly Review* 6 at http://www2.csudh.edu/ccauthen/576f12/frankfurt_harry_-_on_bullshit.pdf (you can also buy this in book form. However, downloading the paper version is sufficient).
- Listen to PowerPoint #4.
- Listen to PowerPoint #5.
- Discussion Assignment #2 (one original post and at least two responses to the posts of others)
- QUIZ #2

Supplemental

I've found the following presentations interesting. Even though they don't have exactly the same concerns as our lecture (i.e., to come up with a working definition of "lie"), they present interesting insights by CIA analysts, FBI analysts and others concerning how to spot liars you encounter. Click on the images below and give them a look see if you are so interested.

Spotting a liar Lying Methods of Detection



I've also found the following presentations interesting. Click on the images below and give them a look see if you are so interested. The first two are video presentations of the central thesis of Frankfurt's book by Frankfurt himself. The third is an attempt by philosophy Lindsay Beyerstein to apply Frankfurt's distinctions to recent politics.



Week 3: Moral Theory and Why are Lies and Bullshit Wrong -- if and when they are? (Mon., May 16 – Sun., May 22)

Required

- Read John Stuart Mill's "What Utilitarianism Is" in the Readings Folder.
- Read "Summary of Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals" (in the Readings Folder and at chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/viewer.html?pdfurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.rbphilo.com%2Fbaron_richard_kant_groundwork.pdf&clem=116385&chunk=true) (This is a summary of Kant's *Groundwork* which you should read in connection with my PowerPoint presentation. The *Groundwork* itself is notoriously difficult.)
- Read Jan Garrett's "A Simple and Usable (Although Incomplete) Ethical Theory Based on the Ethics of W. D. Ross" and at <https://people.wku.edu/jan.garrett/ethics/rossethc.htm>. (This is a short piece which tries to elaborate on and refine Ross's theory)
- Listen to PowerPoint #6.
- Discussion Assignment #3 (one original post and at least two responses to the posts of others)
- QUIZ # 3
- EXAM #1 (covers all material up to this point, not PowerPoint #7)
- Listen to PowerPoint #7.

Supplemental

I've found these to be useful, brief expositions of the moral theories we have reviewed.

Utilitarianism

Kantian Deontology

Rossian Deontology



Week 4: Case Study #I -- Climate Change Denialism (Mon., May 23 – Sun., May 29)

Required

- Read Harry Frankfurt's *On Truth*. (Knopf, 2006) ISBN-10: 030726422X; ISBN-13 : 978-0307264220
- Read Naomi Oreskes' and Joseph Eric Conway's *Merchants of Doubt* Chapter 6 The Denial of Global Warming (selection)
- Listen to PowerPoint #7, #9, #10, #11, #12, #13
- Read the following article and watch accompanying video:
- “On the Origins of Environmental Bullshit,” by David Schlosberg, *The Conversation*, Published: July 25, 2017, at <https://theconversation.com/on-the-origins-of-environmental-bullshit-80955>. Erik M. Conway – “Merchants of Doubt: How Climate Science Became a Victim of the Cold War – Earth101” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iV6A4CZkOXg>. “Merchants of Doubt: What Climate Deniers Learned from Big Tobacco,” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJIW5yVkw>. If you would like, you can see the entire film *Merchants of Doubt*. It is available on Amazon Prime, or you can rent it for \$4.99 by going to <https://www.primevideo.com/detail/amzn1.dv.gti.46bc4b05-117d-1d57-b65f-17863846b2d4>. There are also numerous other lectures about and presentations of the *Merchants of Doubt* material which you can find on YouTube.
- QUIZ 4

Additionally, all this material and more is presented in print form in the book *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*, by Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway (Bloomsbury, 2010), ISBN-10: 9781608192939, ISBN-13: 1608192938. I considered ordering this as a required text, but decided against it to keep costs down. But it is a book that I strongly recommend.

- Discussion Assignment #4 (one original post and at least two responses to the posts of others)

Week 5: Case Study #2 -- Graphic Bullshit (Sun., May 30 – Monday, June 5)

Required

- Listen to PowerPoint #14
- Discussion Assignment #5 (one original post and at least two responses to the posts of others)
- QUIZ #5

Supplemental

The following YouTube videos and websites provide brief overviews of the material we have been talking about, reviewing many of the same points and more (click on images below).



Week 6: Lies and Bullshit on the Internet and Living in a Shared Reality (Sun., June 6 – June 19)

Required

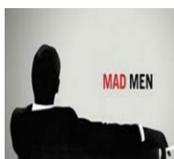
- Listen to PowerPoint #8.
- Listen to PowerPoint #9.
- Read Neil Postman’s “Informing Ourselves to Death” (in the “Readings” Folder).
- Discussion Assignment #6 (one original post and at least two responses to the posts of others)
- QUIZ #6 (a)
- QUIZ #6 (b)
- EXAM #2

Supplemental

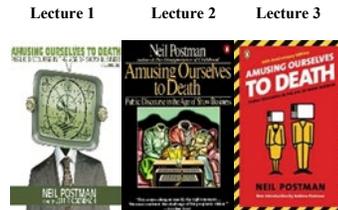
Replacing Thoughts with Images and Emotions in Reasoning

This material dovetails that above quite nicely. I urge you to look at it, but I am not requiring you to do so. In the above material, our concern is with the question, “How does information overload blend into disinformation and bullshit?” In this block, our concern is with the question, “How are bullshit beliefs created by carefully crafted images?” The aim here is to become more cognizant of the kind of “emotional argumentation” (as we might call it) which often substitutes for reasoned argumentation in modern consumer and political culture, particularly as it involves the use of images in lieu of reasoned thought.

A good introduction to the theme of the next few sessions is conveyed by the video “Doublethink” (at *The Power of Images: Marketing as Doublethink* (Linked to picture below)). So, watch it so that we can spend some time thinking about the significance of the media culture in which manipulative emotional appeals pass for arguments all the time.



The ideas here are deeply influenced by Neil Postman's book *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. You can buy a copy of it (for about 22 bucks new) or else download a copy of it from the web at <https://quote.ucsd.edu/childhood/files/2013/05/postman-amusing.pdf>. Additionally, you might want to watch these three excellent video lectures of Jeffrey Metzger's, which collectively summarize the content of the first part of Postman's book (linked to the images below).



COURSE ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Assessment Components and Grading Schemes

- Activities will include two short essay exams and 6 discussion assignments in which they must interact with both the instructor and each other.
- If applicable, the letter grade conversion scale.
- Each of the following will count for $\frac{1}{4}$ of the course grade: Discussion assignments (taken collectively), Quizzes (taken collectively), Exam #1 (MC, TF format), Exam #2 (Short Essay format). This setup is intended to accommodate different students who do best at different kinds of graded work. All work will be submitted through D2L. This setup is intended to accommodate different students who do best at different kinds of graded work. All work will be submitted through D2L.
- Each of the above four graded components of the course is necessary to pass the course as a whole. This means that you must do all the discussions, take all the quizzes, and take both exams to pass.
- The course is self-paced. Thus, submission of “late” work is not strictly an issue. However, I recommend due date guidelines for students to follow. The idea here is to give students some leeway to help them handle non-academic responsibilities (e.g., work, family), while encouraging them not to fall too far behind.
- Participation is indirectly measured by students' participation in the discussion assignments (and thus counts as 25% of the course grade).
- Prior to the withdraw deadline, students must have received: grades for a minimum 30% of the course grade OR (for non-graded courses) formal feedback based on their performance in the course.

Grading System

This course uses a combination of letter and number grades, according to the F.1.1 Undergraduate Grading System chart below. The university's Undergraduate Grading System is available here:

Grade	Grade Point Value	Description
A+	4.00	Outstanding performance
A	4.00	Excellent performance
A-	3.70	Approaching excellent performance
B+	3.30	Exceeding good performance
B	3.00	Good performance
B-	2.70	Approaching good performance
C+	2.30	Exceeding satisfactory performance
C	2.00	Satisfactory performance
C-	1.70	Approaching satisfactory performance.
D+	1.30	Marginal pass. Insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject
D	1.00	Minimal Pass. Insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject. The Faculty of Law utilizes a "D" grade that does not carry weight in calculating the grade point average. This will be noted in the calendar description as "Not Included in GPA" where applicable.
F	0.00	Failure. Did not meet course requirements. Several Faculties utilize an F grade that does not carry weight in calculating the grade point average. This will be noted in the calendar description as "Not Included in GPA" where applicable.
I	0.00	Incomplete. Sufficient work has not been submitted for evaluation, unable to adequately assess. May also be used when a final exam is not submitted.
CG		Credit Granted. Not included in the GPA calculation. See section F.1.3 for additional detail.
CR		Completed Requirements. Carries no weight in calculating the grade point average. This will be noted in the calendar description as "Not Included in GPA" where applicable.

Notes:

- A grade of "C-" or below may not be sufficient for promotion or graduation, see specific faculty regulations.
- The number of "D" and "D+" grades acceptable for credit is subject to specific undergraduate faculty promotional policy.

In most cases where the final letter grade for the course is less than 1% from the next higher grade, the instructor will round-up. This course does not use a bell curve – whatever mark you get is it.

This is the numerical percentage breakdown for grades:

Percentage	Letter	Graded	Point	Description
96 + %	A+	97	4.0	Outstanding
90 – 95.9 %	A	92	4.0	Excellent
85 – 89.9 %	A–	87	3.7	Approaching Excellent
80 – 84.9 %	B+	82	3.3	Exceeding Good
75 – 79.9 %	B	77	3.0	Good
70 – 74.9 %	B–	72	2.7	Approaching Good
65 – 69.9 %	C+	67	2.3	Exceeding Satisfactory
60 – 64.9 %	C	62	2.0	Satisfactory
55 – 59.9 %	C–	57	1.7	Approaching Satisfactory
53 – 54.9 %	D+	54	1.3	Marginal Pass
50 – 52.9 %	D	52	1.0	Minimal Pass
0 – 49.9 %	F	0	0	Did Not Meet Requirements

The “Descriptions” cited above mean the following (to the extent that they mean anything):

A+	4.00	Outstanding performance
A	4.00	Excellent performance
A-	3.70	Approaching excellent performance
B+	3.30	Exceeding good performance
B	3.00	Good performance
B-	2.70	Approaching good performance
C+	2.30	Exceeding satisfactory performance
C	2.00	Satisfactory performance
C-	1.70	Approaching satisfactory performance.
D+	1.30	Marginal pass. Insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject
D	1.00	Minimal Pass. Insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject.
F	0.00	Failure. Did not meet course requirements.

I 0.00 Incomplete. Sufficient work has not been submitted for evaluation, unable to adequately assess.

CG Credit Granted. Not included in the GPA calculation.

CR Completed Requirements. Carries no weight in calculating the grade point average. This will be noted in the calendar description as “Not Included in GPA” where applicable.

Notes:

A grade of "C-" or below may not be sufficient for promotion or graduation, see specific faculty regulations.

The number of "D" and "D+" grades acceptable for credit is subject to specific undergraduate faculty promotional policy.

Student Conduct

A Student Code of Conduct Agreement, available on D2L, is part of this course. It is a required component of the class (see “Engagement”). Students are expected to attend class regularly. They must come prepared and ready to work.

Responsibility for fulfilling the requirements for all aspects of the course resides with the student. The professor will not give out lecture notes, repeat information, nor provide replacement copies of material provided during regular class meetings.

Students must adhere to the Principles of Conduct, both Academic and Non-Academic, as outlined in the University of Calgary Calendar: ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html

Course Technology

A D2L portal has been set up for this course that allows for group correspondence, course announcements, class materials, assignment submissions and grading, and other forms of communication. Students are expected to check D2L before class time for any last-minute changes or cancellations. D2L only uses @ucalgary email addresses.

Student-Instructor Communication

Appropriate communication procedures are described in detail in the Student Code of Conduct Agreement. The instructor’s preferred means of communication is first by scheduled office hours, then by a pre-arranged meeting time (only if the professor’s office hours conflict with another course), and then by email.

The instructor will endeavor to respond to emails within three business days of receiving the message. *If the student emails a question that is fully addressed by the syllabus, Student Code of Conduct, or posted on D2L, the instructor will not reply.* If you don’t receive a response within three business days, you can likely find the answer yourself. The instructor may respond to your email query with the request that you meet in person to discuss. Please note, that the university’s

regular business hours are 8:30-4:30, Monday through Friday and excludes recognized holidays. See the Academic Schedule for more details: ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/academic-schedule.html.

IMPORTANT PROGRAM, DEPARTMENTAL, FACULTY AND UNIVERSITY INFORMATION

Academic Accommodations

It is the student's responsibility to request academic accommodations according to the University policies and procedures. The student accommodation policy can be found at ucalgary.ca/legal-services/sites/default/files/teams/1/Policies-Student-Accommodation-Policy.pdf.

Students needing an Accommodation because of a disability or medical condition should communicate this need to Student Accessibility Services in accordance with the Procedure for Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: ucalgary.ca/legal-services/sites/default/files/teams/1/Policies-Accommodation-for-Students-with-Disabilities-Procedure.pdf. Students needing an Accommodation in relation to their coursework or to fulfil requirements for a graduate degree, based on a protected ground other than disability, should communicate this need, preferably in writing, to their instructor.

Student Support and Resources

Full details and information about the following resources can be found at ucalgary.ca/current-students/student-services

- Wellness and Mental Health Resources
- Student Success Centre
- Student Ombuds Office
- Student Union (SU) Information
- Graduate Students' Association (GSA) Information
- Emergency Evacuation/Assembly Points
- Safewalk

Academic Advising

If you are a student in the Faculty of Arts, you can speak to an academic advisor in the Arts Students' Centre about course planning, course selection, registration, program progression and more. Visit the Faculty of Arts website at <https://arts.ucalgary.ca/current-students/undergraduate/academic-advising> for contact details and information regarding common academic concerns.

For questions specific to the philosophy program, please visit arts.ucalgary.ca/philosophy. Further academic guidance is available by contacting Jeremy Fantl (Undergraduate Program

Director, jfantl@ucalgary.ca) or David Dick (Honours Advisor, dgdick@ucalgary.ca). General inquiries may be sent to phildept@ucalgary.ca.

You may find answers to your more specific questions about a degree in Gender and Sexuality Studies at the University Calgary at <https://arts.ucalgary.ca/gsxs> or contact the Coordinator of the GSXS Program, Joe Kadi at jkadi@ucalgary.ca.

Writing Assessment and Support

The assessment of all written assignments—and, to a lesser extent, written exam responses—is based in part on writing skills. This includes correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc.), as well as general clarity and organization. Research papers must include a thorough and accurate citation of sources. Students are also encouraged to use Writing Support Services for assistance (one-on-one appointments, drop-in support and writing workshops). For more information, and other services offered by the Student Success Centre, please visit ucalgary.ca/ssc.

Responsible Use of D2L

Important information and communication about this course will be posted on D2L (Desire2Learn), UCalgary's online learning management system. Visit <https://ucalgary.service-now.com/it> for how-to information and technical assistance.

All users of D2L are bound by the guidelines on the responsible use of D2L posted here: <https://elearn.ucalgary.ca/commitment-to-the-responsible-use-of-d2l/>. The instructor may establish additional specific course policies for D2L, Zoom, and any other technologies used to support remote learning. Instructional materials, including audio or video recordings of lectures, may not be posted outside of the course D2L site. Students violating this policy are subject to discipline under the [University of Calgary's Non-Academic Misconduct policy](#).

Media Recording

Please refer to the following statement on media recording of students:

https://elearn.ucalgary.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Media-Recording-in-Learning-Environments-OSP_FINAL.pdf

Academic Misconduct/Honesty

Cheating or plagiarism on any assignment or examination is as an extremely serious academic offense, the penalty for which will be an F on the assignment or an F in the course, and possibly a disciplinary sanction such as probation, suspension, or expulsion. For information on academic misconduct and its consequences, please see the University of Calgary Calendar at ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html.

Intellectual honesty requires that your work include adequate referencing to sources. Plagiarism occurs when you do not acknowledge or correctly reference your sources. If you have questions about referencing, please consult your instructor.

University Policies

The Instructor Intellectual Property Policy is available at ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/Intellectual%20Property%20Policy.pdf

The University of Calgary is under the jurisdiction of the provincial Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act, as outlined at ucalgary.ca/legalservices/foip. The instructor (or TA) must return graded assignments *directly* to the student UNLESS written permission to do otherwise has been provided.

All students are required to read the University of Calgary policy on Acceptable Use of Material Protected by Copyright (ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/acceptable-use-of-material-protected-by-copyright-policy.pdf) and requirements of the copyright act (laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-42/index.html).

All students are required to read the University of Calgary policy on Acceptable Use of Material Protected by Copyright (<https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/sites/default/files/teams/1/Policies-Acceptable-Use-of-Material-Protected-by-Copyright-Policy.pdf>) and requirements of the copyright act (<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-42/index.html>).