

PH 203-06 (17123): The Ethics of Lying Emerson College, Fall 2018

WHEN AND WHERE: Mondays and Wednesdays from 4:00-5:45pm in Tufte PPC Building, Rm. 1014

INSTRUCTOR: Guy Schuh

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OFFICE HOURS: 2-4pm Tuesdays in Walker Building, Rm. 921

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

We will investigate the morality of lying and truthfulness using a comparative approach. The first section will cover the history of Western thinking about lying and truthfulness; the second section will cover Classical and Modern Chinese thinking about lying and truthfulness. The purpose of this comparison will be to reveal what may be our (merely) local and questionable ideas about the morality of honesty as well as to discover what the two traditions have in common. The third section will discuss the value of the truth—is knowing or telling the truth something that's valuable just by itself? We will conclude with a discussion of "Post-Truth" in contemporary politics. We will try to analyze what sort of attitude towards or views about the value of truth "Post-Truth" involves.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

(1) Sissela Bok, *Lying*, Vintage, 1999.

(2) Susan Blum, *Lies That Bind: Chinese Truth, Other Truths*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.

(3) Lee McIntyre, *Post-Truth*, MIT, 2018.

All other required texts will be made available on Canvas.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

(1) Reading Quizzes (10%): Quizzes will be posted on canvass for each reading. They must be completed before the start of the class the reading is assigned for. **Students are required to complete 18.** If you complete more, I will drop a lowest quiz grade for each extra quiz you complete. **The purpose of the quizzes is to provide you extra motivation to read before class.** The better prepared you are for class, the better, and more fruitful, our class discussions will be.

(2) Attendance / Participation (10%): Group assignments will be a substantial part of class. They will include coming up with questions about the reading for larger class discussion, coming up with objections to positions taken by authors (and responding to the objections of other groups), and answering questions about the reading provided by me. Groups will be assigned during the first class and will remain fixed for the semester. Engagement in these assignments is a large part of your participation grade. Having discussions with me during office hours is another way you can contribute to your participation grade. **More than 2 unexcused absences will lower your participation grade; it also has the potential to directly lower your final grade, depending on the number of unexcused absences and your closeness to a grade cutoff point.**

(3) Three Short Papers (16 2/3% each): Each paper is 2-3 pages and due at the times indicated on the syllabus. The format of each paper will differ, but they will reflect group work assignments—e.g., one paper may require you to ask a question about a reading in a section and then attempt to answer it; another may ask you to come up with an objection to a position taken by an author in a section and then write out the best available response to that objection. So, the more effort you put into the

various group assignments, the more practiced you'll be in the various paper formats. **Short papers are submitted online via canvass.**

(4) Final Paper (30%): A 5-7 page paper on a topic of your choosing. The format of the final paper should match the format of one of the shorter papers. It is strongly encouraged that you discuss your final paper topic with me in advance. Students are permitted, even encouraged, to expand a shorter paper into their final paper in light of feedback. **The final paper is due in-class in hard-copy on the final day of class.**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this course, you will have thought through the ethics of lying in both the Western and Eastern traditions. In doing so, you'll learn to isolate, classify, and compare contrasting ethical views. You'll also learn how to both support and object to these views. In addition, you'll exercise both interpretive and critical thought on primary texts that include readings from numerous genres and disciplines, and visual media. You'll produce critical written analyses of those texts. You will practice applying the concepts and theories you've read about, and we've discussed, to our society and to your own life. In the course of doing so, you'll improve your abstract thinking, your close reading skills, your expository writing skills, and, perhaps most importantly, your ability to clearly, openly, and sympathetically discuss ethical questions in a humane and philosophical way.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STATEMENT:

Every student in this class should be honored and respected as an individual with distinct experiences, talents, and backgrounds. Students should be treated fairly regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identification, disability, socio-economic status, or national identity. Issues of diversity may be a part of class discussion, assigned material, and projects. I will make every effort to ensure that an inclusive environment exists for all students. If you have any concerns or suggestions for improving the classroom climate, please do not hesitate to speak with me or to contact the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at 617-824-8528 or by email at diversity_inclusion@emerson.edu

DISABILITY STATEMENT:

Emerson is committed to providing equal access and support to all students who qualify through the provision of reasonable accommodations, so that each student may fully participate in the Emerson experience. If you have a disability that may require accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) at SAS@emerson.edu or 617 824 8592 to make an appointment with an SAS staff member. Students are encouraged to contact SAS early in the semester. Please be aware that accommodations are not applied retroactively.

PLAGIARISM STATEMENT:

It is the responsibility of all Emerson students to know and adhere to the College's policy on plagiarism, which can be found at: <http://www.emerson.edu/policy/plagiarism>. If you have any question concerning the Emerson plagiarism police or about documentation of sources in work you produce in this course, speak to me.

ELECTRONICS POLICY:

Cell phone use is prohibited at all times during class. Phones must be turned off and put away by the start of class. Failure to do so will harm your participation grade. Laptops or tablets may only be used during group work assignments; however, students are only permitted to view topical material. Non-topical use of electronics (social media etc...) will harm your participation grade. **At all other times, the use of electronics is prohibited.** If there's a good reason for an exception, speak with me.

Schedule (subject to change)

9/5: Introduction.

Tools for the Moral Assessment of Lying and Truthfulness

9/10: Sissela Bok, *Lying*, Introduction, Chapter 1; David Ross, "The Nature of Morally Good Action"

9/12: Bok, *Lying*, Chapter 2; Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, Chapters 2 and 7

Western Treatments of Lying and Truthfulness

9/17: In-Class Viewing: Dramatic Reading of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qPqbcceDF0Y>)

9/19: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 2, chapters 6-7, Book 4, chapter 7,
Book 7, chapters 1-2, 9

9/24: Plato, *Republic* 327a-331d, 368c-369d, 380c-383c, 412b-417b; Bok, *Lying*, Chapter XII

9/26: Augustine, *Lying* 1-3, 6, 12-14; *Against Lying*, Introduction, chapters 7-10, 15-21

10/1: Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, selections;
"On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives;" Bok, *Lying*, Chapter 3

10/3: In-Class Viewing: Krzysztof Kieslowski, *Dekalog: Eight*

10/9 (Monday Schedule): Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Chapter 2; Bok, *Lying*, Chapter IV

10/10: Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, pgs. 25-39, 44-8, 63-87; **First Paper Due**

Eastern Treatments of Lying and Truthfulness

10/15: Kongzi (Confucius), *Analects*, selections

10/17: Kongzi, *Analects*, selections on *xin* (信; "honesty," "trustworthiness")

10/22: Mengzi (Mencius), *Mengzi*, 3b9; Mozi, selections; "Robber Zhi"

10/24: Mengzi, *Mengzi*, selections

10/29: Mengzi, *Mengzi*, selections on *xin* (信)

10/31: Han Fei Tzu, selections

11/5: Wang Xiaofang, *The Civil Servant's Notebook*, "Number Two Department, Department Head, Yang Hengda," "Chief of the Municipal Finance Bureau, Chen Shi;" Susan Blum, *Lies That Bind: Chinese Truth, Other Truths*, Chapters 1-3

11/7: Blum, *Lies That Bind*, Chapters 5-6, 8-9; **Second Paper Due**

The Value of Truth

11/12: Veteran's Day: No Class

11/14: Plato, *Republic* 357a-d, 382a-c; *Sophist* 227d-230e; *Philebus* 20b-22b; Robert Nozick, selections on the Experience Machine

11/19: In-Class Viewing: Hans W. Geissendörfer, *The Wild Duck* (film adaptation of Ibsen's play).

11/21: Thanksgiving Break: No Class

11/26: Nietzsche, selections

11/28: Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, Chapters 1 and 3

12/3: Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, Chapter 5

12/5: Harry Frankfurt, "On Bullshit"; **Third Paper Due**

12/10: Lee McIntyre, *Post-Truth*, Chapters 1-3

12/12: McIntyre, *Post-Truth*, Chapters 6-7; "Stop Blaming Postmodernism for Post-Truth"

12/17: **Final Paper Due In-Class**