

**Moral Issues & the Arts and Humanities  
Knowledge, Doubt, and Public Discourse  
IAH 231B – section 005**

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**Texts**

*Crimes Against Logic: Exposing the Bogus Arguments of Politicians, Priests, Journalists, and Other Serial Offenders*, Jamie Whyte (McGraw Hill: 2005).

*Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Noam Chomsky (Seven Stories Press: 2002).

*Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*, Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway (Bloomsbury Press: 2010)

*1984*, George Orwell (Signet Classic, Penguin: 1977)

\*\* Other required readings are listed in the syllabus below, and are available through ANGEL ( A).

**Course Description**

In IAH 231B, section 5, we will reflect on the themes of knowledge, doubt, and public discourse. Throughout the course, we will look at how language is used in the media (print, internet, TV, and radio). Our examination of media discourse will be oriented toward the following question: Does the media promote respect for knowledge and truth? Or does it foster doubt and unprincipled skepticism instead? For nearly 3,000 years, thinkers have linked the search for knowledge and truth with moral goodness. The distinction between true and false beliefs is not an idle academic issue, but is a distinction with moral weight. To illustrate the moral quality of discourse, knowledge, and doubt, we will learn about and evaluate four current controversies: (a) "death panels"; (b) torture; (c) "liberal bias" (say, in the media); and (d) global warming. It is often said that a vibrant and healthy media (a "free press") is vital to a free society, since reliable information is necessary to the judgment and decision-making of citizens. So it is important to consider whether media discourse equips citizens to gain knowledge and evaluate competing knowledge claims; or, on the contrary, whether the media cultivates doubt and suspicion concerning the possibility of knowledge and conflict resolution.

**Goals of Integrative Studies in Arts and Humanities**

Integrative Studies in Arts and Humanities at MSU seeks to assist students to become more familiar with ways of knowing in the arts and humanities and to be more knowledgeable and capable in a range of intellectual and expressive abilities. IAH courses encourage students to engage critically with their own society, history, and culture(s); they also encourage students to learn more about the history and culture of other societies. They focus on key ideas and issues in human experience; encourage appreciation of the roles of knowledge and values in shaping and understanding human behavior; emphasize the responsibilities and opportunities of democratic citizenship; highlight the value of the creative arts of literature, theater, music, and arts; and alert us to important issues that occur among peoples in an increasingly interconnected, interdependent world.

## **Student Learning Goals**

You will become familiar with basic concepts in logic in order to improve critical reading and analytic skills. Students will develop expressive skills: i.e., your ability to express your positions cogently and to defend them with reasoned argument. The interdisciplinary focus of IAH will widen cultural awareness, including reflection on the cultural influence of the social and natural sciences, as well as the influence of the media. Finally, the course will increase students' familiarity with ways of knowing in the Humanities.

## **Grading**

8 quizzes, 5% each (40% of final grade)

2 tests (a midterm and a final), 20% each (40% of final grade)

\*\*\*\* The midterm is October 18; the final is December 14, 7:45-9:45 am \*\*\*\*

4 short papers, 5% each (20% of final grade)

The quizzes will be unannounced, "pop" quizzes. I may give them at the beginning or end of class, or somewhere in between; they may address material from the reading as well as class discussion. If you miss a quiz, you lose those points *unless* you had notified me of the absence beforehand and the reason for the absence is legitimate (e.g., participation in a University event).

## **Academic Integrity**

Academic Honesty: Article 2.3.3 of the Academic Freedom Report states: "The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards." IAH also adheres to the policies on academic honesty specified in General Student Regulation 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades; the all-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades; and Ordinance 17.00, Examinations. (See Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide and/or the MSU Web site [www.msu.edu](http://www.msu.edu).)

So, unless authorized by your instructor, you are expected to complete all course assignments, including homework, quizzes, tests and exams, without assistance from any source. You are expected to do original work for the course; you may not submit course work completed for another course or someone else's answers to satisfy the requirements for this course. You are not authorized to use the [www.allmsu.com](http://www.allmsu.com) Web site to complete any course work in this course. Students who violate MSU rules may receive a penalty grade, including *but not limited to* a failing grade on the assignment or in the course.

## **Students with Disabilities**

It is Michigan State University's policy to not discriminate against qualified students with documented disabilities in its educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for accommodations in this course, contact the instructor and the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCDP), located in 120 Bessey Hall. For an appointment with a counselor, call 353-9642 (voice) or 355-1293 (voice). The instructor should be notified as early in the semester as possible.

## **Classroom Etiquette**

As noted in the course description, the content of this class involves political and moral controversies. People have strong feelings about such controversies, and the strength of those convictions indicates their gravity and complexity. Although I will not take class attendance or grade participation, attendance and participation are important and expected. (I expect that you notify me ahead of time of absences. If you do not and you miss a quiz, you lose those points.) Please avoid lateness. (It's disruptive.) Above all – especially given that we are purposefully addressing controversies – be sure to respect your classmates, your TA and instructor, as well as the class forum.

## **READING SCHEDULE**

### Week 1

Thur. 9-1: Introduction: overview of syllabus, and class requirements and expectations

### **Argumentation: Thinking Well and Reasoned Debate**

### Week 2

Tues. 9-6: Plato, “Allegory of the Cave” and excerpts from “The Apology”; Christopher Lasch, “The Lost Art of Argument”; Chris Mooney, “The Science of Why We Don’t Believe Science (A)”

Thur. 9-8: Lecture – *Basic Concepts of Logic*: arguments and statements, inferences; deductive and inductive argument: validity & strength; definitions and types of dispute; informal fallacies

### Week 3

Tues. 9-13: *Crimes Against Logic* – “The Right to Your Opinion,” “Motives,” “Authority” (1-30); “Shut Up!” (51-61); “Morality Fever” (147-157)

Thur. 9-15: *Crimes Against Logic* – “Empty Words” and “Inconsistency” (70-94); “Equivocation” and “Begging the Question” (97-116)

### **“Death Panels” – or Extensions of Personal Freedom?**

### Week 4

Tues. 9-20: “False ‘Death Panel’ Rumor has some Familiar Roots”; “Experts Debunk Health Care Reform Bill’s ‘Death Panel’ Rule”; [“In Last Ditch Effort To Derail Reform, Right Wing Calls Medicare Commission A ‘Death Panel’”](#); [“Bachmann Agrees With Radio Host’s Description Of Berwick As ‘Chairman Of The Obamacare Death Panel’”](#); [“Palin rehashes ‘metaphor’ excuse to dodge accountability for the Lie of the Year.”](#) (all available on A)

Thur. 9-22: “Comas: Karen Quinlan, Nancy Cruzan, and Terri Schiavo” (which I’ve subtitled ‘End-of-life decisionmaking, including euthanasia & physician-assisted suicide’) (A)

### **Torture**

### Week 5

Tues. 9-27: Jean Amery, “Torture”; Eduardo Galeano “Chronicle of Torture and Victory” (A)

Thur. 9-29: Andrew Sullivan, "The Abolition of Torture" (A); Definitions of torture: Geneva Geneva Conventions; U.S. DOJ; etymology of the term (*torquere*)

#### Week 6

Tues. 10-4: "Secret U.S. Endorsement of Severe Interrogations" (*NY Times*: 10-4-2007); "Rorschach and Awe" (*Vanity Fair*: 7-17-2007); "The Black Sites: A Rare Look Inside the CIA's Secret Interrogation Program" (*The New Yorker*: 8-13-2007); "The Green Light" (*Vanity Fair*: May 2008) (A)

Thur. 10-6: *Taxi to the Dark Side* (director Alex Gibney) – Discussion

#### Week 7

Tues. 10-11: David Bromwich, "The Torture Memo and the Flag in the Lapel"; Clark Hoyt, "Telling the Brutal Truth" (A) – Continue with *Taxi to the Dark Side*

**Optional but recommended:** John Parry, "Escalation and Necessity: Defining Torture at Home and Abroad"

Thur. 10-13: "Giuliani on Torture" (*Salon*: 10-25-2007); "The GOP's Torture Enthusiasts: This Week's Republican Debate Was a Jack Bauer Impersonation Contest" (*LA Times*: 5 18-2007); "A glossary of US military torture euphemisms" (*The Guardian*: 12-12 2007); "NPR's ombudsman: Why we bar the word 'torture'" (*Salon*: 6-22-2009); "The Still Growing NPR 'Torture' Controversy" (*Salon*: 7-2-2009) (A)

### Interlude – Midterm Exam and 1984

#### Week 8

Tues. 10-18: **Midterm exam**

Thur. 10-20: **1984** (pp. 1-63): Discussion of main themes, concepts, and metaphors

#### Week 9

Tues. 10-25: **1984** (pp. 63-224)

Thur. 10-27: **1984** (pp. 225-312)

### "Liberal Bias" (in the Media) – "We Report, You Decide"

#### Week 10

Tues. 11-1: *Media Control* – pp. 9-100 (i.e., read the entire book)

Thur. 11-3: Noam Chomsky, "Manufacturing Consent" (A)

#### Week 11

Tues. 11-8: Robert McChesney, "Understanding US Journalism II: Right-Wing Criticism and Political Coverage"; Rick Perlstein, "Inside the GOP's Fact-Free Nation" (A)

Thur. 11-10: Continue discussion from last week and Tuesday; also discuss the concept of *bias*:

What does it mean? How can we spot it? Should it be avoided? (If so, why?)

Week 12

Tues. 11-15: *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism – Fox Attacks! Special Edition*

Thur. 11-17: Glenn Greenwald, “The full-scale collapse: From Murrow to Blitzer” (3-4-2010) and “Today in the ‘liberal media’” (2-11-2010) (A)

**Global Warming: Proper Science, or Global Hoax & Conspiracy?**

Week 13

Tues. 11-22: *Merchants of Doubt* – “Introduction” (1-10) and “Epilogue” (266-274); discuss beliefs about global warming: reasons for accepting or rejecting? What does “skepticism” mean here?

Thur. 11-24: **University is closed – Thanksgiving Break**

Week 14

Tues. 11-29: *Merchants of Doubt* – “Doubt is Our Product” (10-35) and “Constructing a Counternarrative: The Fight over the Ozone Hole” (107-135)

Thur. 12-1: *Merchants of Doubt* – “What’s Bad Science? Who Decides? The Fight over Secondhand Smoke” (136-168)

Week 15

Tues. 12-6: *Merchants of Doubt* – “The Denial of Global Warming” (169-215)

Thur. 12-8: *Merchants of Doubt* – “Denial Rides Again: The Revisionist Attack on Rachel Carson” (216-239)

\*\*\*\* Remember, the **final exam** is Wednesday, December 14, from 7:45-9:45 am. \*\*\*\*

## Writing assignments

1) Every student is required to complete four short writing assignments. Each writing assignment will be worth 5% of your final grade (collectively, these papers count for 20% of the final grade) and will be submitted through ANGEL. Deadlines for each assignment are given below. Note that the class is divided into different topic areas. At the end of certain sections of the class (sections that I specify below) a paper is due. *Late papers will not be accepted.* What this means is that you cannot postpone writing these papers until the end of the semester, then turn them all in at once. If you do not submit a paper by the deadline, you will receive a 0.0 for that portion of your grade.

2) Paper aim:

Learning to question is a vital educational skill. Often we think that intelligence consists of telling people what we know – in other words, having and asserting an opinion. But cultivating an inquisitive attitude, so that we question more deeply and more regularly, suspending the urge to give readymade opinions, can prompt insight and enrich understanding in surprising ways. To put the point differently: Stating an opinion is not the goal of learning or of debate. Our opinion may be wrong. Sometimes the only way to learn our opinion is mistaken (i.e., false, unjustified) is by actively questioning ourselves – our reasons for holding certain beliefs – or by honestly and fairly communicating (debating) with others. The purpose of these papers, then, is to cultivate a readiness and an ability to ask questions – with a view, not to nitpick or to attack, but to learn.

3) Deadlines:

The **first** short paper is due no later than noon (12:00 pm) **Sunday, 9-25**, at the end of the sections “Argumentation: Thinking Well and Reasoned Debate” and “‘Death Panels’ – or Extensions of Personal Freedom?”

The **second** short paper is due no later than noon (12:00 pm) **Sunday, 10-9**, at the end of the section “Torture.

The **third** short paper is due no later than noon (12:00 pm) **Sunday, 11-20**, at the end of the section “‘Liberal Bias’ (in the media)...” (Note, this assignment must address the readings done for the section concerning “bias,” and **not** the novel *1984*.)

The **fourth** paper is due no later than noon (12:00 pm) **Sunday, 12-11**, at the end of the section “Global Warming...”

\*\* You can submit a paper before the deadline. You do not have to wait until the deadline to

turn in a paper. \*\*

#### 4) Paper requirements and grading criteria:

Each paper should be formatted in a uniform way (e.g., 12 pt. font, 1” margins) and **must be** between 250-350 words (a page to a page and a half). You must write at least a page (250 words) but no more than a page and a half (about 350 words). Papers will be marked down if they are too short and also if they are too long. (You should write carefully and purposefully, revising and editing your work before submitting it.)

Strive for the following: in one paragraph, formulate (i.e., develop) a *question* that is relevantly related to the readings. Perhaps you spot a claim that seems unjustified or unsupported, or find a claim that seems important but needs fuller discussion. Perhaps you identify an assumption or notice an implication that is worth drawing attention to or examining more closely. Whatever question you develop, spell it out in the **first paragraph**. Then, in **two further paragraphs**, clearly *explain the relevance* of your question. Your task is to *develop a question* – that is, to motivate a question – that emerges from your reading of the texts assigned for that section of the class. (Resist the urge to jot down a question in a single sentence.) Thus, you must do two things: a) in a complete paragraph, develop a text-sensitive question; and b) in another two paragraphs, explain why your question is relevant to the reading you’ve chosen to address.

Proper grammar and correct sentence and paragraph construction are encouraged, but will not factor into your grades. Grades will be determined by the following criteria:

- *Relevance*: Don’t go on tangents, or use assigned readings as pretexts to talk about your opinion about issues *not addressed* in the texts. To develop a relevant question, be sure you understand the main arguments and claims presented by the author.
- *Accuracy*: You must show that you understand the article or essay you write about. To achieve this, you must be sure that you understand main claims, concepts, and arguments, and that you follow the author’s line of reasoning. Avoid distorting or misrepresenting what an author says – that is, be careful not to create a *straw man*.
- *Clarity*: While you are not graded on writing mechanics, if your writing is confusing, obscure, or difficult to make sense of, the paper will be marked down. Simply put, in order to evaluate your thoughts, your reader must be able to understand your writing.
- *Analysis/Interpretation*: Part of what it means “to motivate” a question is to develop and present to your reader the rationale for the question. Doing so requires that you both *analyze* and *interpret* the text. (What claim is she defending? How does she attempt to support her claim? Does she succeed?) After finding the main claim of a reading, purposefully try to find and assess *the reasons* given in support of that claim.
- *Definitions*: Key terms and concepts, whether your own or ones you encounter in the reading, must be defined. Dictionary definitions can be used, *but only as a starting point*. Do not rely solely on dictionary definitions, which are often overly general. (For example, a dictionary definition of “game” will be of limited use if we read that so-and-so “gamed the system!” or “was just playing games!”) When the meaning of a word matters, it is important to define that word by *unpacking* (by *spelling out*) its

meaning, which involves saying more than can be said in a single sentence.