

# Bullshitting

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## 1 Frankfurt on Bullshit

In his essay “On Bullshit”, Harry Frankfurt identified the phenomenon of bullshit as a distinctive trait of modern societies:<sup>1</sup>

One of the most salient features of our culture is that there is so much bullshit. (Frankfurt 2005 [1986]: 1)

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<sup>1</sup> The essay first appeared in *Raritan* (vol. 6, no. 2) in 1986. It was re-printed in Frankfurt (1988), and later as the monograph Frankfurt (2005 [1986]). Frankfurt's analysis of bullshit explicitly owed much to Max Black's (1983) ideas about what he called *humbug*.

One of Frankfurt's main examples of bullshit was a certain kind of political speech making, as in the following example:

Consider a 4th of July orator who goes on bombastically about “our great and blessed country, whose Founding Fathers under divine guidance created a new beginning for mankind.” (Frankfurt 2005 [1986]:16)

According to Frankfurt, the central characteristic of bullshit of this kind is that the bullshitter is indifferent toward the truth or falsity of what she says. In an often quoted passage Frankfurt describes the bullshitter as follows:

Her statement is grounded neither in a belief that it is true nor, as a lie must be, in a belief that it is not true. It is just this lack of connection to a concern with truth - this indifference to how things really are - that I regard as of the essence of bullshit. (Frankfurt 2005 [1986]: 33-34)

There are three further important features of Frankfurt's analysis of bullshit. First, Frankfurt describes the bullshitter as not caring about her audience's beliefs about the subject matter of her discourse. For example, he says,

the orator does not really care what his audience thinks about the Founding Fathers, or about the role of the deity in our country's history, or the like. At least, it is not an interest in what anyone

thinks about these matters that motivates his speech. (Frankfurt 2005 [1986]: 17)

Second, Frankfurt argues that bullshitting always involves an intention to deceive the audience. Even though, for Frankfurt, the bullshitter is indifferent toward her audience's beliefs about what she says, the bullshitter intends to deceive her audience about her aims:

The bullshitter may not deceive us, or even intend to do so, either about the facts or about what he takes the facts to be. What he does necessarily attempt to deceive us about is his enterprise. His only indispensably distinctive characteristic is that in a certain way he misrepresents what he is up to. (Frankfurt 2005 [1986]: 54)

Third, and finally, Frankfurt insisted on a sharp distinction between bullshitting and lying.<sup>2</sup> For Frankfurt, whereas the bullshitter is indifferent toward the truth or falsity of what she says, the liar is “inescapably concerned with truth-values.” (Frankfurt 2005 [1986]: 51) He writes,

Telling a lie is an act with a sharp focus. It is designed to insert a particular falsehood at a specific point in a set or system of beliefs, in order to avoid the consequences of having that point occupied by the truth. (ib.)

To summarize, the bullshitter, for Frankfurt, is characterized by four different features, as spelled out below.

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<sup>2</sup> In his reply to Cohen (2002), Frankfurt (2002) argued that his account allowed the two categories to overlap. See Section 6 of this chapter.

F1. The bullshitter is indifferent toward whether what she says is true or false.

F2. The bullshitter is indifferent toward her audience's beliefs.

F3. The bullshitter intends to deceive her audience into thinking that she is not bullshitting.

F4. Bullshitting and lying are incompatible.

This chapter first reviews a number of reactions to Frankfurt's analysis of bullshit (Sections 2-3). It then considers a proposal to account for bullshitting in terms of Gricean maxims of conversation (Section 4). Next, an alternative proposal to analyze bullshitting in terms of the speaker's attitudes toward *inquiry* is discussed (Section 5). Finally, the chapter turns to the relation between bullshitting and lying (Section 6).

### Bullshit, Bullshitting, and Nonsense

One strand of commentary on Frankfurt's essay concerns its target, that is, what it should be seen as providing an account of. In his well-known rejoinder to Frankfurt's view, G.A. Cohen (2002) argued that one should distinguish between the *activity* of bullshitting and the *product* bullshit. According to Cohen, Frankfurt provided an account of the former but not of the latter.

The product Cohen is interested in is what he calls *nonsense*.<sup>3</sup> As he describes it, nonsense is what is found in

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<sup>3</sup> Compare Daniel Dennett's (2013: 56-57) notion of a *deepity*.

discourse that is by nature *unclarifiable*, discourse, that is, that is not only obscure but which cannot be rendered unobscure, where any apparent success in rendering it unobscure creates something that isn't recognizable as a version of what was said. (Cohen 2002: 332)

Cohen distinguishes between different ways in which an utterance may be unclear in the sense he has in mind. One of these he characterizes as "unclarity of a sentence itself", and another as "unclarity as to why a certain (possibly perfectly clear) sentence is uttered in a given context." (ib.) For Cohen, both these kinds of nonsense can be the product either of bullshitting or of not bullshitting. As he says, "One can "talk nonsense" with any intentions whatsoever [...]." (Cohen 2002: 324)

To illustrate, consider Scott Kimbrough's (2006: 12-13) example of "an avid fan of conservative talk radio" who claims "that the French are an irrational and ungrateful people, and that liberals have an anti-Christmas agenda." The radio fan's statements are naturally thought of as involving nonsense. For example, the notion of "an anti-Christmas agenda" might be thought to be an unclarity of the first kind that Cohen distinguishes. Furthermore, it might be argued that the radio fan's statements cannot intelligibly be seen as pertinent, and hence that they are also examples of the second kind of nonsense.

Whether the radio fan is bullshitting arguably depends on different factors. On one reading of the example, the radio fan firmly believes what he says and he wants to enlighten everyone else. In that case the radio fan is naturally seen as not bullshitting. Similarly, Cohen says that

an honest person might read some bullshit that a Frankfurt-bullshitter wrote, believe it to be the truth, and affirm it. When that honest person utters bullshit, *she's* not showing a disregard for truth. (Cohen 2002: 332)

Yet, on another reading, the radio fan is bullshitting. He might say what he does not because he is concerned with the truth or falsity of his statements, but because he wants to present himself in a certain light. In that case, the radio fan would be bullshitting (at least) in the sense of F1.

Cohen concludes,

So it is neither necessary nor sufficient for every kind of bullshit that it be produced by one who is informed by indifference to the truth, or, indeed, by any other distinctive intentional state. (Cohen 2002: 332)

However, as Cohen acknowledges, Frankfurt's account is an account of the activity of bullshitting. In particular, F1-4 are traits that, according to Frankfurt, distinguish someone who is engaged in bullshitting. Yet even as characteristics of bullshitting, each of F1-4 has been challenged.

### 3 Problems for Frankfurt's Account of Bullshitting

Against F1, i.e. the claim that the bullshitter is indifferent toward the truth or falsity of what she says, a number of writers (e.g. Cohen 2002; Kimbrough 2006; Wreen 2013; Carson 2010; Fallis, in press; Stokke and Fallis 2016) have pointed to examples in which someone appears to be

bullshitting while caring about the truth-value of what they say. The following kind of example is not unfamiliar from everyday life:

Lisa is discussing a fishing trip to Lake Mountain View that she has planned to go on with her friends, Vern and Sue. They are all big fans of fishing and have been looking forward to the trip a long time. "I really hope the fishing is good there," Sue says. Lisa has no real evidence about the fishing at Lake Mountain View, and she has no idea what it is like. Still, caught up in the excitement, she exclaims, "The fishing there is outstanding!"

Many will think that Lisa is bullshitting in this case. Yet she is clearly not indifferent toward the truth-value of what she is saying. She wants it to be true that the fishing is good at Lake Mountain View. So this example illustrates that one may be bullshitting even if one cares about whether what one says is true or false.

Here is a different kind of example that Thomas Carson gives:

A student who gives a bullshit answer to a question in an exam might be concerned with the truth of what [s]he says. Suppose that she knows that the teacher will bend over backwards to give her partial credit if he thinks that she may have misunderstood the question, but she also knows that if the things she writes are false she will be marked down. In that case, she will be very careful to write only things that are true and accurate, although she knows that what she writes is not an answer to the question. (Carson 2010: 62)

While Lisa cares about the truth of the particular thing she is saying, the student, in Carson's example, just cares about saying things that are true. But neither of them says things without caring about their truth-value. Examples of this kind have therefore been taken as challenges to F1.

The second feature, F2, of Frankfurt's analysis of bullshitting, i.e. that the bullshitter is indifferent toward her audience's beliefs, has likewise been drawn into question. For example, Cohen points out that,

the bullshitting orator, as Frankfurt describes him, might well care a lot about what the audience thinks about the Founding Fathers. (Cohen 2002: 330)

Familiar forms of propaganda have the characteristic that it is designed to make its audience believe particular things, even if the propagandist herself is indifferent toward them. In other words, the observation is that someone might be bullshitting even if they are not indifferent toward whether their audience come to believe what they say.

Further, against the third feature, F3, of Frankfurt's account, Carson points out that bullshitting does not necessarily involve intentions to deceive the audience about what one is up to. He considers the following case:

I am a student who needs to receive a good grade in a class. I am assigned to write a short essay on a very clearly and precisely defined topic. I know nothing about the topic and cannot write on it at all. Despite this, I know that my instructor will give me partial credit for turning in something, however incompetent and far off the topic. The worst grade I can receive for writing something that

is completely incompetent and off the topic is an F - 60%. If I write nothing I will receive a zero - 0%. In producing a bullshit answer, I am not attempting to mislead my teacher about my level of knowledge or about what I am up to (namely bullshitting her). I don't care about any of these things; I just want to receive 60 points instead of zero points. I might even want my bullshitting to be transparent to the teacher in order to amuse or annoy her. (Carson 2010: 60)

In this example the student is bullshitting but is not trying to hide this fact from the teacher. Hence, this kind of example is evidence against Frankfurt's suggestion that the bullshitter's "only indispensably distinctive characteristic is that in a certain way he misrepresents what he is up to." (Frankfurt 2005 [1986]: 54)

Finally, Frankfurt's claim, F4, that bullshitting and lying are incompatible has been rejected by a number of philosophers. For example, Carson argues that "One can tell a lie as a part of an evasive bullshit answer to a question." (Carson 2010: 61) He gives the following example:

Suppose that I teach at a university that is very intolerant of atheists. I am asked by an administrator whether a friend and colleague is an atheist. I know that he is an atheist and that it will harm him if I reveal this. I do not want to harm my friend nor do I want to lie and say that he is not an atheist as I fear that I am likely to be found out if I lie about this. I give an evasive bullshit answer. I say "as a boy he always went to church and loved singing Christmas Carols" even though I know this to be false. (I am not

worried that I will be caught or found out if I lie about this).  
(Carson 2010: 61-62)

According to Carson, the answer, in this case, “is evasive bullshit, but because I say what I know to be false in a context in which I know that I am warranting the truth of what I say, my answer is also a lie.” (Carson 2010: 62)

#### 4 Bullshitting and Gricean Quality

Given these kinds of challenges to Frankfurt's description of bullshitting, alternative positive accounts have been proposed. One type of view involves seeing bullshitting in terms of conversational norms.

In particular, both bullshitting and lying are modes of speech that typically violate one or more of the Gricean maxims of Quality (see Grice 1989: 27). Grice's category of Quality consisted of a Supermaxim and two more specific maxims:

**Supermaxim of Quality:** Try to make your contribution one that is true.

**First Maxim of Quality:** Do not say what you believe to be false.

**Second Maxim of Quality:** Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

There have been attempts to characterize lying in terms of maxims of Quality (see “Lying, Sincerity, and Quality”, this volume, ch. 11). Similarly, it has been suggested that bullshitting can be characterized in terms of Quality maxims.

Marta Dynel (2011) and Don Fallis (2009; 2012) have proposed accounts of bullshitting in terms of (versions of) the Second Maxim of Quality. For example, Dynel claims that

The violation of the second Quality maxim “Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence” [...] gives rise to *bullshit*, which the hearer takes to be truthful. (Dynel 2011: 152)

And according to Fallis,

you bullshit if and only if you intend to violate the norm of conversation against communicating something for which you lack adequate evidence by saying that thing. (Fallis 2012: 575)

These views imply that someone is bullshitting if they say that  $p$  and thereby intend to communicate that  $p$ , while lacking adequate evidence for  $p$ .

Problems for this type of account arise due to the fact that one may believe that one has adequate evidence for a proposition, even though one does not. Typically, if someone says what they believe they have adequate evidence for, they are not bullshitting. Here is an example:

Joan has read a science fiction novel in which one of the characters states that there is life on Saturn. Joan thinks science fiction novels are a reliable guide to facts about extraterrestrial life. So she comes to believe firmly that there is life on Saturn, and she also believes that she has adequate evidence for that claim, that is, the novel's say-so. Indeed, Joan thinks she knows there's life on Saturn. Sometime later, her younger brother asks her whether there's life anywhere else than on Earth. Joan replies, "Yes, there's life on Saturn."

Joan is not bullshitting. She is not engaged in the kind of irresponsible talk that arguably characterizes Frankfurt's orator, as well as Lisa and the careful exam taker in Carson's example. Joan's response is motivated by her wish to inform her brother of what she believes to be the truth. But in saying something for which she lacks adequate evidence, and thereby intending to communicate that thing, Joan is violating the Second Maxim of Quality, and likewise the slightly modified norm that Fallis appeals to.

In response to this, one may want to argue that the Second Maxim of Quality should be understood as prohibiting statements made while one *believes* that one lacks adequate evidence for them. This would make the norm parallel to the First Maxim of Quality, which prohibits saying something one believes to be false. So one might propose that someone is bullshitting if and only if they say that  $p$  and thereby intend to communicate that  $p$ , while believing that they lack adequate evidence for  $p$ .

This proposal can likewise be seen to be inadequate. In particular, it can be rejected by considering the kind of speakers that have been described

by Jennifer Lackey (2008) and others. Consider, for example, the case of Stella from Lackey's "Creationist Teacher" case:

Stella is a devoutly Christian fourth-grade teacher, and her religious beliefs are grounded in a deep faith that she has had since she was a very young child. Part of this faith includes a belief in the truth of creationism and, accordingly, a belief in the falsity of evolutionary theory. Despite this, she fully recognizes that there is an overwhelming amount of scientific evidence against both of these beliefs. Indeed, she readily admits that she is not basing her own commitment to creationism on evidence at all but, rather, on the personal faith that she has in an all-powerful Creator. (Lackey 2008: 48)

Suppose that Stella is asked, in a private conversation, outside school, what she thinks about the origin of species. She replies, "God created the species."

In this example, despite the fact that Stella says and intends to communicate something for which she believes she lacks adequate evidence, she is surely not bullshitting. She says what she does because she is convinced of its truth, and she is motivated by a wish to convey that truth to her interlocutor. This clearly distinguishes her from speakers like the orator.

In other words, it seems doubtful that one can identify a sufficient condition for bullshitting in terms of (a version of) the Second Maxim of Quality. As argued below, the same applies to the other Quality maxims.

According to most theories of lying, you lie when you say something you believe to be false, and thereby try to communicate that thing to the

audience.<sup>4</sup> Hence, when someone tells a lie, they violate both the Supermaxim of Quality and the First Maxim of Quality. Furthermore, even if critics of Frankfurt like Carson (2010) are right that lying is not incompatible with bullshitting, it is reasonable to think that Frankfurt was correct in thinking that at least some lies are not instances of bullshitting.

Consider, for instance, the following example:

Parker wants to convince his parents that he's ready for his chemistry exam. Even though Parker hasn't studied, when asked by his parents, he tells them, "I have studied really hard, and I'm ready for the chemistry exam."

Most likely, cases of lying of this kind were the motivation for Frankfurt's claims concerning the distinction between bullshitting and lying. In particular, lies like Parker's are "designed to insert a particular falsehood at a specific point in a set or system of beliefs, in order to avoid the consequences of having that point occupied by the truth." (Frankfurt, 2005 [1986], 54) Accordingly, many will want to say that, even though Parker is lying to his parents, he is not bullshitting. Yet lies like this one violate both the Supermaxim of Quality and the First Maxim of Quality.

Finally, there are reasons to think that one can engage in bullshitting without violating Quality maxims. Consider Carson's exam taker who gives bullshit answers while carefully selecting what to say in order to say only things she believes to be true, because that is how she knows she will get partial credit. Assuming the student has adequate evidence for what

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<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Chisholm and Feehan (1977); Williams (2002); Fallis (2009; 2012); Saul (2012); Stokke (2013; 2014).

she says, she is bullshitting while obeying all the Quality maxims. She is trying to make true contributions, and she says what she believes to be true and has adequate evidence for.

## 5 Bullshitting and Inquiry

Frankfurt's central insight was that bullshitting involves indifference toward one's speech. His suggestion was that the indifference that marks bullshitting concerns the truth-value of what is said. Yet, given that bullshitters may care about the truth-value of what they say, an alternative route is to look for another way of characterizing bullshitting in terms of indifference.

Fallis (in press) and Stokke and Fallis (2016) have proposed accounts on which bullshitting is characterized by indifference toward *inquiry*.<sup>5</sup> In the tradition originating in the work of Robert Stalnaker (1978; 1984; 1998; 2002) a discourse is seen as a cooperative activity of information sharing, ultimately aimed at the goal of inquiry, the discovery of how things are, or what the actual world is like.<sup>6</sup> Following Craige Roberts (2004; 2012) inquiry in this overarching sense can be distinguished from particular *subinquiries* that discourse participants engage in as means toward the goal of inquiry itself.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Stokke (2013; 2014) for related accounts of lying and other forms of linguistic insincerity.

<sup>6</sup> It is not suggested that discourse does not serve other goals, or have other aims, as well as the pursuit of truth. For example, engaging in discourse may be done for entertainment, for socializing purposes, or for other ends.

<sup>7</sup> In the model of discourse developed by Roberts (2004); (2012), such subinquiries are identified with *questions under discussion* that, formally,

According to one version of this account, someone is bullshitting when they do not care whether their statement is a contribution to a subinquiry that they believe to be true or a contribution that they believe to be false<sup>s</sup>. That is, when they are indifferent toward whether their statement steers the relevant subinquiry toward (what she believes to be) truth or falsity. Hence, on this view, the indifference that marks bullshitting is not indifference toward whether what is said is true or false, but indifference toward the effect of one's statement on subinquiries.

This account allows that someone can be bullshitting even though they care about the truth or falsity of their statements. For example, consider Lisa's wishful claim about the fishing at Lake Mountain View. Lisa is not indifferent toward the truth-value of her statement. She cares very much about whether it is true or not. However, she is careless about making contributions to the subinquiry about the fishing at Lake Mountain View based on what she believes. She is not making her statement because she is interested in making progress on this subinquiry, nor because she wants it to deteriorate. So, on this view, Lisa is bullshitting because she lacks concern for how the subinquiry fares as a result of her statement. Her statement is not motivated by a wish to move the subinquiry about the fishing at Lake Mountain View either in the direction of truth or in the direction of falsity.

To be sure, there may be nearby versions of the example in which Lisa does believe what she says. In those cases, however, Lisa may be seen as

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structure the set of possible worlds among which assertions distinguish. The details of this are left out here. In contrast to the account in Frankfurt (in press), the proposal of Stokke and Fallis (2016) is explicitly couched in terms of questions under discussion.

<sup>s</sup> There are refinements to the proposal to be considered in light of complications. We ignore these here. See Stokke and Fallis (2016) for discussion. See also Carson (2016) for some criticism of this view.

paralleling Stella, the Creationist Teacher, who says something she believes to be true, even though she has no evidence for it, and knows she does not. Even though this kind of talk is criticizable, it may not be considered as bullshitting.

Next, consider Carson's careful exam taker. The student in this case differs from Lisa in that she is not interested in contributing particular propositions because she cares about *their* truth-values. Rather, she is merely concerned with contributing true propositions. However, she is not concerned with whether her statements are true or false contributions to the subinquiry she is engaged in, i.e. the exam. So, on this view, the exam taker can be seen as illustrating the fact that while one may be interested in contributing truths to the discourse or conversation, one may be indifferent toward the effect of one's statements on a particular subinquiry.

Further, bullshitters who are indifference toward making true or false contributions to an ongoing subinquiry may or may not be indifferent toward their audience's beliefs and may or may not intend to deceive them about their intentions and motivations. For example, while Frankfurt's 4th of July orator can be seen as disregarding whether his statements are true or false contributions to subinquiries - e.g. about the role of the deity in the history of his country, the inspiration of the Founding Fathers, etc. - he may still be concerned with whether his audience come to believe what he says. And similarly he may be hoping to deceive them about his indifference toward making true or false conversational contributions. So, this view also accommodates the criticism of F2-3.

## 6 Bullshitting and Lying

As we have seen, Frankfurt's original claim, F4, about the incompatibility of bullshitting and lying has been challenged. Frankfurt later conceded that bullshitting, in the sense of F1, i.e. indifference toward the truth-value of what one asserts, is not incompatible with lying. In his reply to Cohen (2002), Frankfurt argued that "The relationship between bullshit and lies is not as problematic on my account [...]." (Frankfurt 2002: 340) In particular, Frankfurt noted that some instances of bullshitting are also instances of lying:

My presumption is that advertisers generally decide what they are going to say in their advertisements without caring what the truth is. Therefore, what they say in their advertisements is bullshit. Of course, they may also happen to know, or they may happen to subsequently discover, disadvantageous truths about their product. In that case what they choose to convey is something that they know to be false, and so they end up not merely bullshitting but telling lies as well. (Frankfurt 2002: 341)

In other words, Frankfurt acknowledges that someone might be bullshitting in the sense of F1 - i.e. by being indifferent toward the truth-value of what they say - even when they are saying something they know to be false. For Frankfurt, such speakers are "liars only, as it were, incidentally or by accident." (Frankfurt 2002: 341)

Moreover, there is at least one kind of lying that is clearly not bullshitting, on Frankfurt's view. These are cases in which someone has the goal of asserting a false proposition  $p$ , not because she is particularly

interested in asserting  $p$  but because she is interested in asserting something false. This is what Augustine (1952: 87) called the “real” lie, i.e. “the lie which is told purely for the pleasure of lying and deceiving [...].” Someone who tells you such a lie wants you to believe something false *because* it is false. For example, if you ask someone for directions to the railway station, they might point you in the wrong direction simply for the amusement of making you go the wrong way. This kind of liar, therefore, cannot be said to be indifferent toward the truth-value of what she asserts, and hence lies of this kind are not counted as instances of bullshitting by F1.

However, as Frankfurt himself notes, few liars are Augustinian real liars:

Everyone lies from time to time, but there are very few people to whom it would often (or even ever) occur to lie exclusively from a love of falsity or of deception. (Frankfurt 2005 [1986]: 59)

The more common kind of lie is the kind exemplified by Parker's lie to his parents about having prepared for the chemistry exam. Parker says what he does because he is interested in saying *that thing*. Had he studied, his purposes would have been served just as well by telling the truth.

A challenge for Frankfurt's view, therefore, is whether it can agree that ordinary lies of this kind are not instances of bullshitting. If so, it can preserve the spirit of the original proposal by maintaining that, even though some bullshitting is also lying, most lying is not bullshitting.

Can it be argued that ordinary liars, like Parker, care about the truth-value of what they are asserting? One reason to think not is the following. The fact that the ordinary liar believes that what she asserts is false does

not play a role in why she asserts it. Such liars assert that  $p$  because they want to assert  $p$ , while disregarding the fact that they disbelieve  $p$ . Hence, it is natural to say that the truth-value of  $p$  is unimportant to the ordinary liar. She wants to assert  $p$ , regardless of whether  $p$  is true or false. This makes the ordinary liar appear to be bullshitting, on Frankfurt's view, and consequently, threatens to make most lies instances of bullshitting.

One potential way of avoiding this result is suggested in "On Bullshit" where Frankfurt writes,

For most people, the fact that a statement is false constitutes in itself a reason, however weak and easily overridden, not to make the statement. For Saint Augustine's pure liar it is, on the contrary, a reason in favor of making it. For the bullshitter it is in itself neither a reason in favor nor a reason against. (Frankfurt 2005 [1986]: 59)

So, according to this line of thought, the fact he has not prepared for the exam is a reason for Parker to not assert that he has, albeit it is a reason that is overridden – or that he takes to be overridden – by the urgency of convincing his parents. On the other hand, for bullshitters, neither the truth or falsity of what they assert is a reason for asserting or not asserting them, not even reasons that have been overridden.

This characterization of the ordinary liar will strike many as plausible. It is natural to say that all else being equal - in particular, had he not needed to convince his parents - Parker would take the fact that he has not studied as a reason not to say that he has. However, it is less clear whether this can sufficiently distinguish the ordinary liar from the bullshitter. Consider the 4th of July orator. It may strike one as true of the orator that all else being equal - in particular, had he not needed to present himself in

a particular light, or convince his audience of certain claims, or the like - he would count the falsity of a proposition as a reason against asserting it. Similarly, the advertisers Frankfurt describes may be said to have reasons for saying what they do, which they have allowed to override the reasons provided by their beliefs concerning the truth-values of the relevant claims.

To be sure, there may be some particularly hardened bullshitters who are indifferent toward how they present themselves, as well as to what their audience believes, and in general do not have reasons that can be said to override those provided by the truth or falsity of what they say. Yet it is arguable that this is a marginal phenomenon, if it is one.

Another suggestion Frankfurt gives concerns the stance of the liar and the honest person regarding describing the world:

Both in lying and in telling the truth people are guided by their beliefs concerning the way things are. These guide them as they endeavor either to describe the world correctly or to describe it deceitfully. For this reason, telling lies does not tend to unfit a person for telling the truth in the same way that bullshitting tends to. (Frankfurt 2005 [1986]: 59-60)

The Augustinian real liar is plausibly described as guided by her beliefs about how things are. She asserts that  $p$  because she wants to deceive about  $p$  and believes not- $p$ . However, it is not obvious that liars like Parker are guided by their beliefs concerning the way things are. Parker does not assert that he has studied because of his beliefs about whether he has or not, but because that assertion is the one he needs to make. Hence, at least ordinary liars are not guided by their beliefs concerning how things stand

with regard to what they are asserting. Perhaps it can be said of Parker that he is guided by his beliefs concerning how things stand with regard to some other facts, e.g. his parents' likely reaction to the truth, or the like. But the orator may equally be said to be guided by his beliefs concerning how things stand with regard to his potential benefitting from saying certain things, or with regard to what is expected of him, or the like.

Even though Frankfurt's account allows that some bullshitting is also lying, distinguishing the two phenomena adequately remains a challenge for a view that focuses on attitudes toward the truth-value of what is asserted in characterizing bullshitting.

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