



c. Colourbox

No Bullshit!

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This title is a failed program. In fact, we are surrounded -and more every second- by amazing lies, made-up “news”, disinformation and disregard to truth and science. It will be hard and tough for me to explore -and denounce, vilipend, castigate, chase bullshit. But I shall try (not my best and shall not fall in the trap full of...shit!) to give you an opportunity, a chance to chase bullshit.

Let us start with my favorite source: Wikipedia:

Bullshit (also **bullshite** or **bullcrap**) is a common English expletive which may be shortened to the euphemism **bull** or the initialism **B.S.** In British English, "bollocks" is a comparable expletive. It is mostly a slang term and a profanity which means "nonsense", especially as a rebuke in response to communication or actions viewed as deceptive, misleading, disingenuous, unfair or false. As with many expletives, the term can be used as an interjection, or as many other parts of speech, and can carry a wide variety of meanings. A person who communicates nonsense on a given subject may be referred to as a "bullshit artist".

In philosophy and psychology of cognition the term "bullshit" is sometimes used to specifically refer to statements produced without particular concern of truth, to distinguish from a deliberate, manipulative lie intended to subvert the truth. In business and management, guidance for comprehending, recognizing, acting on and preventing bullshit, are proposed for stifling the production and spread of this form of misrepresentation in the workplace, media and society. Within organizations bullshitting is considered to be a social practice that people engage with to become part of a speech community, to get things done in that community, and to reinforce their identity. Research has also produced the Organizational Bullshit Perception Scale (OBPS) that reveals three factors of organizational bullshit (regard for truth, the boss, and bullshit language) that can be used to gauge perceptions of the extent of organizational bullshit that exists in a workplace.

While the word is generally used in a deprecatory sense, it may imply a measure of respect for language skills or frivolity, among various other benign usages. In philosophy, Harry Frankfurt, among others, analyzed the concept of *bullshit* as related to, but distinct from, lying.

As an exclamation, "Bullshit!" conveys a measure of dissatisfaction with something or someone, but this usage need not be a comment on the truth of the matter.

Etymology

"Bull", meaning nonsense, dates from the 17th century, while the term "bullshit" has been used as early as 1915 in British and American slang, and came into popular usage only during World War II. The word "bull" itself may have derived from the Old French *bole* meaning "fraud, deceit". The term "horseshit" is a near synonym. An

occasionally used South African English equivalent, though more common in Australian slang, is "bull dust".

Although there is no confirmed etymological connection, these older meanings are synonymous with the modern expression "bull", generally considered and used as a contraction of "bullshit".

Another proposal, according to the lexicographer Eric Partridge, is that the term was popularized by the Australian and New Zealand troops from about 1916 arriving at the front during World War I. Partridge claims that the British commanding officers placed emphasis on *bull*; that is, attention to appearances, even when it was a hindrance to waging war. The foreign Diggers allegedly ridiculed the British by calling it **bullshit**.

In George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*, Orwell writes that the insult bullshit stems from Bolshevik, and the association with communists is the source of the word's insult.

In the philosophy of truth and rhetoric

Assertions of fact

"Bullshit" is commonly used to describe statements made by people concerned with the response of the audience rather than with truth and accuracy. On one prominent occasion, the word itself was part of a controversial advertisement. During the 1980 U.S. presidential campaign, the Citizens Party candidate Barry Commoner ran a radio advertisement that began with an actor exclaiming: "*Bullshit! Carter, Reagan and Anderson, it's all bullshit!*" NBC refused to run the advertisement because of its use of the expletive, but Commoner's campaign successfully appealed to the Federal Communications Commission to allow the advertisement to run unedited.

Harry Frankfurt's concept

In his essay *On Bullshit* (originally written in 1986, and published as a monograph in 2005), philosopher Harry Frankfurt of Princeton University characterizes bullshit as a form of falsehood distinct from lying. The liar, Frankfurt holds, knows and cares about the truth, but deliberately sets out to mislead instead of telling the truth. The "*bullshitter*", on the other hand, does not care about the truth and is only seeking to impress:

It is impossible for someone to lie unless he thinks he knows the truth. Producing bullshit requires no such conviction. A person who lies is thereby responding to the truth, and he is to that extent respectful of it. When an honest man speaks, he says only what he believes to be true; and for the liar, it is correspondingly indispensable that he considers his statements to be false. For the bullshitter, however, all these bets are off: he is neither on the

side of the true nor on the side of the false. His eye is not on the facts at all, as the eyes of the honest man and of the liar are, except insofar as they may be pertinent to his interest in getting away with what he says. He does not care whether the things he says describe reality correctly. He just picks them out, or makes them up, to suit his purpose.

Frankfurt connects this analysis of bullshit with Ludwig Wittgenstein's disdain of "non-sense" talk, and with the popular concept of a "bull session" in which speakers may try out unusual views without commitment. He fixes the blame for the prevalence of "bullshit" in modern society upon anti-realism and upon the growing frequency of situations in which people are expected to speak or have opinions without appropriate knowledge of the subject matter.

Several political commentators have seen that Frankfurt's concept of bullshit provides insights into political campaigns. Gerald Cohen, in "*Deeper into Bullshit*", contrasted the kind of "bullshit" Frankfurt describes with a different sort: nonsense discourse presented as sense. Cohen points out that this sort of bullshit can be produced either accidentally or deliberately. While some writers do deliberately produce bullshit, a person can also aim at sense and produce nonsense by mistake; or a person deceived by a piece of bullshit can repeat it innocently, without intent to deceive others.

Cohen gives the example of Alan Sokal's "*Transgressing the Boundaries*" as a piece of *deliberate* bullshit. Sokal's aim in creating it, however, was to show that the "postmodernist" editors who accepted his paper for publication could not distinguish nonsense from sense, and thereby by implication that their field was "bullshit".

David Graeber's theory of bullshit work in the modern economy

Anthropologist David Graeber's book *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory* argues the existence and societal harm of meaningless jobs. He contends that over half of societal work is pointless, which becomes psychologically destructive.

In everyday language

Outside of the academic world, among natural speakers of North American English, as an interjection or adjective, *bullshit* conveys general displeasure, an objection to, or points to unfairness within, some state of affairs. This colloquial usage of "bullshit", which began in the 20th century, "bullshit" does not give a truth score to another's discourse. It simply labels something that the speaker does not like & feels he is unable to change.

In the colloquial English of the Boston, Massachusetts area, "bullshit" can be used as an adjective to communicate that one is angry or upset, for example, "*I was wicked bullshit after someone parked in my spot*".

In popular culture

The Showtime TV series *Penn & Teller: Bullshit!* debunks many common beliefs and often criticizes specific people's comments. Penn Jillette stated the name was chosen because you could be sued for saying someone is a liar, but not if you said they were talking bullshit:

https://www.imdb.com/video/vi2143730969?playlistId=tt0346369&ref=vp_rv_ap_0

Bullshit is as old as humans socialized 100,000 years ago (that's a looooong time ago!). There's good evidence of discussions in Ancient Greece, Mesopotamia, China and India; all these had some form of writing and could accumulate evidence of disagreement; bullshit was always what the *other* guy was arguing!

The real modern revolution that allowed for bullshit to start invading all corners of the planet, all the time we have, all the information we need, all the moments of our lives could be dated **August 27th, 1976 at the Alpine Hills Café/Restaurant on Alpine Road, in Portola Valley, CA 94028**, a walking distance from my home. That day Vincent Cerf (who had developed the technology and had named it *Internet*), and a few colleagues from Stanford University, drafted the final sketch of this concept. And as the saying goes *the rest is history!*

Besides the Internet, the Stanford's Larry Page and Sergey Brin's Google, The Bill Gates and Paul Allen of Microsoft, and, later, Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook (plus many others) created the social media trove that allows bullshit to reign supreme. Remember Albert Einstein's immortal quote: ***Only two things are infinite, the universe and human stupidity, and I'm not sure about the former.***

Psychology Today on July 02, 2020 posted an excellent article authored by Joe Pierre, MD: ***The Psychology of Bullshit.***

Part 1 deals with: *Psychology research unpacks this increasingly pervasive phenomenon.*

"One man's bullshit is another man's catechism." — "Bullshit and the Art of Crap Detection," Neil Post.

What Is Bullshit and Why Is There So Much of It?



Source: Doug Beckers/Flickr (edited)

With his 1986 essay *“On Bullshit,”* Princeton philosopher Harry Frankfurt gave birth to bullshit as a topic of serious academic inquiry.

What is bullshit exactly? In technical terms, it has been defined as *“communications that result from little to no concern for truth, evidence and/or established semantic, logical, systemic, or empirical knowledge.”*

Put more simply, bullshit is *“something that implies but does not contain adequate meaning or truth.”*

So bullshitting isn’t just nonsense. It’s constructed in order to appear meaningful, though on closer examination, it isn’t. And bullshit isn’t the same as lying. A liar knows the truth but makes statements deliberately intended to sell people on falsehoods. Bullshitters, in contrast, aren’t concerned about what’s true or not, so much as they’re trying to appear as if they know what they’re talking about. In that sense, bullshitting can be thought of as a verbal demonstration of the Dunning-Kruger effect—when people speak from a position of disproportionate confidence about their knowledge relative to what little they actually know, bullshit is often the result.

If that sounds all too familiar in today’s world, consider that Dr. Frankfurt’s 1986 essay (as well as his 2005 book of the same name) began with the claim that *“one of the most salient features of our culture is that there is so much bullshit.”* More than 30 years later, that claim seems more relevant than ever now.

Wake Forest University psychologist John Petrocelli found evidence to support that beyond the Dunning-Kruger effect, bullshitting tends to happen when there’s social pressure to provide an opinion and a social *“pass”* that will allow someone to get away with it. Three decades ago, Dr. Frankfurt noted that such conditions were

present in an America where people felt entitled if not obligated to offer “*opinions about everything*,” and politics in particular, and where objective reality was often denied in favor of voicing impassioned personal opinions.

Fast-forwarding to the “*post-truth*” world of 2020, where facts and expertise have been declared dead, opinions are routinely confused with news, and objective evidence is endlessly refuted, the case could be made that bullshit has reached epic proportions. In this regard, the contribution of the internet is hard to ignore. Psychology research from Dr. Matt Fisher and colleagues at Yale University demonstrated that the Dunning-Kruger effect is amplified by access to the internet—we tend to conflate the ability to look up information on the internet with actual personal knowledge. Social media also offers an environment that combines the social pressure to bullshit with an anonymity that provides the social “*pass*.”

Pseudoprofound Bullshit Receptivity and Its Implications

While Dr. Frankfurt sparked the academic study of bullshit and bullshitting, few have advanced our knowledge of “*bullshittees*”—those who consume bullshit—more than Regina University psychology professor Dr. Gordon Pennycook. He and his colleagues won an Ig Nobel Peace Prize for developing a questionnaire designed to quantify receptiveness to a particular kind of bullshit that they called “*pseudoprofound bullshit*.”

The Bullshit Receptivity Scale (BRS) asks respondents to rate the profoundness of “seemingly impressive assertions that are presented as true and meaningful but are actually vacuous” constructed from a random mash-up of words taken from Deepak Chopra’s tweets (e.g., “*hidden meaning transforms unparalleled abstract beauty*”) and similar “*profound-sounding words*” from The New Age Bullshit Generator (e.g., “*consciousness is the growth of coherence, and of us*”). This scale has revealed that the appeal of such seemingly profound, but actually meaningless statements varies across individuals as a continuous psychological trait that can be quantified.

Across various research studies, bullshit receptivity has been associated with paranormal and pseudoscientific beliefs, belief in conspiracy theories, the tendency to perceive connections between unrelated things, and the tendency to perceive false or fake news as accurate as well as a willingness to share it on social media. It’s inversely correlated with intelligence and analytical thinking. Studies exploring associations between bullshit receptivity and political ideology have found positive correlations with certain aspects of political conservatism including support of conservative social policies, as well as favorable views of Senators Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio and President Trump. However, bullshit receptivity is by no means a trait exclusive to conservatives—evidence from Sweden indicates correlation with Green Party affiliation. Behaviorally, higher bullshit receptivity has been associated with lower engagement in “*prosocial*” acts like donating to or volunteering for charity.

Collectively, although correlation doesn't equal causation, the early returns on bullshit receptivity research thus far suggest that receptivity to pseudoprofound bullshit is a tendency of those who think more intuitively than analytically. Stated another way, the opposite of bullshit receptivity—bullshit detection—seems to require active, deliberate reflection and analysis, rather than accepting things based on gut feeling. This requires considerable cognitive effort on our part, whereas bullshit receptivity may reflect a kind of cognitive laziness or, less pejoratively, a trap into which it's all too easy for us to fall.

Bullshit and Politics

This means that we have a lot of work to do if we ever hope to free ourselves, and one of the most watched, followed and aberrant website is the one of **QAnon**. This US-born conspiracy has been described by Wikipedia; here is the Introduction to a long -and useful entry that I urge you to read in full:

QAnon (/ˌkjuːəˈnɒn/), or simply **Q**, is a disproven and discredited American far-right conspiracy theory alleging that a secret cabal of Satan-worshipping, cannibalistic pedophiles is running a global child sex-trafficking ring and plotted against former U.S. president Donald Trump while he was in office. QAnon is commonly called a cult.

QAnon commonly asserts that Trump has been planning a day of reckoning known as the "Storm", when thousands of members of the cabal will be arrested. QAnon supporters have accused many liberal Hollywood actors, Democratic politicians, and high-ranking government officials of being members of the cabal. They have also claimed that Trump feigned conspiracy with Russians to enlist Robert Mueller to join him in exposing the sex trafficking ring and preventing a coup d'état by Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and George Soros. The QAnon conspiracy theories have been amplified by Russian state-backed troll accounts on social media, as well as Russian state-backed traditional media.

Although preceded by similar viral conspiracy theories such as Pizzagate, which has since become part of QAnon, the conspiracy theory began with an October 2017 post on the anonymous imageboard website 4chan, by "Q" (or "QAnon"), who was presumably an American individual; it is now more likely that "Q" has become a group of people acting under the same name. A stylometric analysis of Q posts claims to have uncovered that at least two people wrote as "Q" in different periods. Q claimed to be a high-level government official with Q clearance, who has access to classified information involving the Trump administration and its opponents in the

United States. NBC News reported that three people took the original Q post and shortly thereafter spread it across multiple media platforms to build an Internet following for profit. QAnon was preceded by several similar anonymous 4chan posters, such as FBIAnon, HLIAnon (High-Level Insider), CIAAnon, and WH Insider Anon. Although American in origin, there is now a considerable QAnon movement outside of the United States, including in the United Kingdom and France since 2020, with a "particularly strong and growing" movement in Germany and Japan. Japanese QAnon adherents are also known as "JAnon" (Japanese: J).

QAnon adherents began appearing at Trump reelection campaign rallies in August 2018. Bill Mitchell, a broadcaster who has promoted QAnon, attended a White House "social media summit" in July 2019. QAnon believers commonly tag their social media posts with the hashtag #WWG1WGA, signifying the motto "*Where We Go One, We Go All*". At an August 2019 Trump rally, a man warming up the crowd used the QAnon motto, later denying that it was a QAnon reference. This occurred hours after the FBI published a report calling QAnon a potential source of domestic terrorism —the first time the agency had so rated a fringe conspiracy theory. According to analysis by Media Matters for America, as of October 2020, Trump had amplified QAnon messaging at least 265 times by retweeting or mentioning 152 Twitter accounts affiliated with QAnon, sometimes multiple times a day. QAnon followers came to refer to Trump as "Q+".



QAnon flag at a Second Amendment rally in Richmond, Virginia, in 2020

The number of QAnon adherents is unclear, but the group maintains a large online following. The imageboard website 8chan, rebranded to 8kun in 2019, is QAnon's online home, as it is the only place Q posts messages. In June 2020, Q exhorted followers in a post on 8chan to take a "*digital soldiers' oath*"; many did, using the Twitter hashtag #TakeTheOath. In July 2020, Twitter banned thousands of QAnon-affiliated accounts and changed its algorithms to reduce the conspiracy theory's spread. A Facebook internal analysis reported in August 2020 found millions of followers across thousands of groups and pages; Facebook acted later that month to remove and restrict QAnon activity, and in October it said it would ban the conspiracy theory from its platform altogether. Followers had also migrated to dedicated message boards including EndChan, where they organized to wage

information warfare in an attempt to influence the 2020 United States presidential election. After Trump lost the election to Joe Biden, updates from Q declined dramatically. QAnon beliefs became a part of attempts to overturn the election results, culminating in the storming of the United States Capitol, leading to a further crackdown on QAnon-related content on social media. On the day of Biden's inauguration, Ron Watkins, a former site administrator for 8chan and a *de facto* leader among QAnon adherents, suggested it was time to "*go back to our lives as best we are able*". Other QAnon adherents believed that Biden's inauguration was "*part of the plan*".

This is just **ONE** out of a myriad of disinformation sites that promote bullshit; and I urge you to read this true story published on *BuzzFeed News* on March 26, 2021 by Scaachi Koul (in the References section); you will discover that this type of bullshit, described in the *BuzzFeed* article is not benign bullshit, but a highly contagious and dangerous one -just like the SARS-Cov-2 of the COVID-19 pandemic, another target of bullshit!

Bullshit and SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19

On March 8, 2021, CNN Politics published a video and a short article showing the major bullshit that COVID-19 vaccination generates on the international stage, in this case Russia vs. the US:

Online platforms directed by Russian intelligence are spreading disinformation about two of the coronavirus vaccines being used in the US, a State Department spokesperson confirmed to CNN on Sunday.

The agency's Global Engagement Center identified three Russian outlets -- News Front, New Eastern Outlook and Oriental Review - that are spreading not only misinformation about the virus, but also regarding "*international organizations, military conflicts, protests; and any divisive issue that they can exploit,*" according to the spokesperson.

"These sites all vary in their reach, tone, and audience -- but they all are spreading Russian propaganda and disinformation. The State Department's finding of a link between these sites and Russian Intelligence is a result of a joint interagency conclusion," the spokesperson said.

The GEC leads efforts *"to recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining or influencing the policies, security, or stability of the United States, its allies, and partner nations,"* according to its website. The Wall Street Journal first reported on the disinformation.

The campaign comes as the US and other countries race to vaccinate people using three vaccines developed in record time by the drug makers Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna and Johnson and Johnson. US officials have been working to increase confidence in the drugs in recent months as studies showed a concerning level of vaccine hesitancy among some people, though that has decreased as the rollout has progressed.

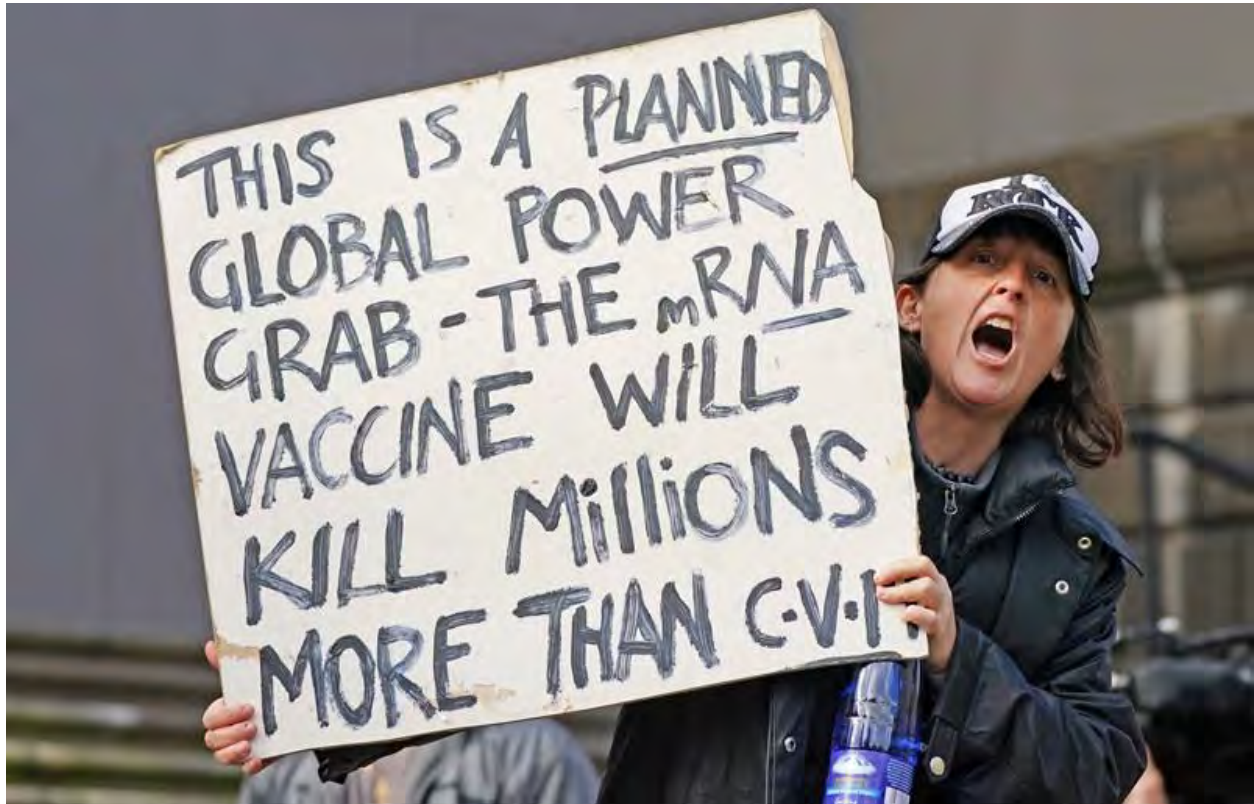
A spokesman for the Kremlin denied to the Journal that the country's intelligence services were spearheading the disinformation campaign. *"It's nonsense. Russian special services have nothing to do with any criticism against vaccines,"* the spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, told the newspaper.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday that the Biden administration is taking steps to address efforts by Russia to undermine confidence in the vaccines *"We can reiterate that we will fight with every tool we have. Disinformation -- we are certainly not new to, we are certainly familiar with, I should say, the approach and tactics of Russian disinformation efforts,"* Psaki said. *"And we will reiterate at every opportunity that these vaccines are safe; they've been approved by the FDA. We will have, of course, health and medical experts conveying that at every turn, and we will look for ways to combat disinformation,"* Psaki added. *"But we are aware of it. We are monitoring it. And we are taking steps to address."*

The Journal reported that, *"Russian state media and Russian government Twitter accounts have made overt efforts to raise concerns about the cost and safety of the Pfizer vaccine in what experts outside the US Have found safe and effective!"* *The emphasis on denigrating Pfizer is likely due to its status as the first vaccine besides Sputnik V to see mass use, resulting in a greater potential threat to Sputnik's market dominance,* a forthcoming report by the Alliance for Securing Democracy says, according to the Journal.

One outlet in the disinformation campaign, News Front, used international reports to play *"up the risk that a person who receives the Pfizer or Moderna Inc. vaccines could contract Bell's palsy, in which facial muscles are paralyzed,"* according to the Journal, which noted that while a small number of side effects have been reported by vaccine recipients, the shots are overwhelmingly safe and effective.

Pamela Eisele, a spokeswoman for Pfizer, told the newspaper that so far, *"millions of people have been vaccinated with our vaccine following the endorsement of regulators in multiple countries."* A spokeswoman for Moderna didn't immediately respond to the Journal's request for comment.



c. Nature

Wired of March 24, 2021 published a short -but great! - article titled **The Professors Who Call 'Bullshit' on Covid-19 Misinformation**. Here it is, slightly edited for clarity:

A few years ago, Jevin West told fellow University of Washington professor Carl Bergstrom that he was starting a new course on big data. "Oh yeah," Bergstrom joked, "I'm starting a course called *'Calling bullshit on big data.'*"

The pair worked together to develop a course, *Calling Bullshit*, broadening the scope to offer tips on how to detect and disarm spurious appeals to data and science in anything from TED talks to medical papers. The syllabus went viral, and dozens of universities around the world now draw on the UW material. Bergstrom and West reoriented their careers around bullshit detection, wrote a forthcoming book, and in December established a new Center for an Informed Public.

A month later, the novel coronavirus arrived. The professors quickly realized it would be their toughest assignment yet in forensic scatology. The pandemic has added Miracle-Gro to what Bergstrom and West's course calls the "natural ecology of bullshit." Human nature and society—particularly online—offer psychological and

monetary rewards for attracting attention, regardless of whether information is accurate. That the president of the United States has repeatedly spread untruths about the coronavirus and the government's response aggravates the situation. As the virus spreads, Bergstrom and West have been deluged by calls for help checking suspect claims and have helped clean up Covid-19 misinformation on Twitter and elsewhere. What they've found offers tips on spotting and avoiding the information hazards of pandemic times—and suggests we will be navigating them for a while. Last week, Bergstrom, an infectious disease specialist, chased down a viral Twitter thread in which neurologist Scott Mintzer at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia described ICUs in Seattle, 2,800 miles away, flooded with dying patients, citing an unidentified intensivist. It included a claim that doctors were withholding life-saving equipment from overweight patients. Bergstrom reached out to Seattle health care workers to check on the claims and received many messages refuting them. He also contacted Mintzer, who he says initially defended his posts but later deleted them. *"The lesson is to be really questioning of unsourced, secondhand reports when they are the most shocking and dramatic,"* Bergstrom says. Mintzer told WIRED, "Disputes about accuracy were not the main reason I took it down." Saturday evening, Bergstrom spent several hours writing a 31-tweet thread debunking a widely shared Medium post by a tech worker who said, based in part on his experience in viral marketing, that officials are overreacting with strict limits on personal movement. Soon after, Medium replaced the post with a message stating that it is *"under investigation or was found in violation of the Medium Rules."* Some conservative figures have rallied around the deleted Medium post, which the author has reposted elsewhere, saying its removal unfairly quashed his freedom to express his opinions. Bergstrom says his debunking of the post and intervention on the Seattle ICU thread have triggered waves of online abuse. He believes his fact-checking attempts have been flagged on trolling forums, such as 4chan. West says preliminary analysis of a database of coronavirus-related tweets that UW has gathered since mid-January suggests right-wing trolls are actively boosting Covid-19 misinformation.

Once information has been amplified online, West says, it can come to be seen as authoritative even by people who should know better. Earlier this month, a friend asked him to help Washington state dentists debating whether to shut their doors to patients. One of the main pieces of evidence shaping the discussion was a Medium post in which a marketing executive without public health expertise warned of the seriousness of the pandemic and offered charts and models he had made predicting its future growth. *"These were medical professionals, some of the most at risk-workers, sharing advice from an inexperienced source,"* West says. The state's governor shut down non-emergency dental appointments on March 19.

The Covid-19 crisis has also unleashed a plague of beguiling but confusing or even misleading charts and maps. Bergstrom has pushed back on one widely trafficked apples-to-oranges comparison that made the rapidly growing death toll from coronavirus look trifling by placing it next to the larger but steady fatalities from endemic diseases such as malaria.

A recent entry in ***Business Insider*** explores the differences between *misinformation vs. disinformation*. I am providing an edited summary:

Misinformation is everywhere online, and anyone can be vulnerable to it. On social media, you may have at one point shared an article that you believed to be true at the time, but that you later discovered actually contained falsehoods or outdated information.

While both misinformation and disinformation can deceive audiences, the distinction is that disinformation is intentionally, maliciously deceptive. Both forms often involve widespread dissemination, whether or not the person sharing is aware of the inaccuracies.

Misinformation has become so prevalent online that some organizations have launched initiatives to tackle it, such as the Google News Initiative, and Poynter's MediaWise Teen Fact-Checking Network

What is misinformation?

The term misinformation refers to information that is false or inaccurate, and is often spread widely with others, regardless of an intent to deceive.

Business Insider spoke with Brian Southwell, an author, social scientist, professor, and director at RTI International, a nonprofit research institute, about the differences between misinformation and disinformation, as well as how to spot each in the real world.

There's a conspiracy theory circulating online that claims 5G cellular networks cause cancer, or even COVID-19, despite there being no scientific evidence to support this claim. The main idea behind the false claim is that 5G radio waves are harmful to the brain and cause health issues such as autism and cancer. However, experts have debunked this concern, explaining that 5G radio waves cannot damage the DNA in our cells, nor can they even penetrate past the skin, which acts as a protective barrier. This theory is an example of misinformation because it presents incorrect and out-of-context information as fact.

Southwell said he's been seeing a lot of misinformation surrounding the coronavirus pandemic and vaccine. He noted that in early spring when the virus was just beginning to grip the country, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention did

not recommend the use of masks. But just weeks later, the agency reversed its recommendation based on new data citing their effectiveness.

"Science offers us an estimate — the best idea based on available evidence now [or] six months from now that might change, and that's okay, that's the way science works," Southwell said. "So, if you've got people that are not paying attention to the historical context, and they're going back willingly pointing to something that was a year old and reporting that as new information now, well that combination is misinformation."

What is disinformation?

While misinformation is false information that is created and spread regardless of an intent to harm or deceive, disinformation is a type of misinformation that is created to be deliberately deceptive. Both forms may be shared widely, regardless of whether or not the sharer knows the information is wrong.

"Disinformation is not a 21st century phenomenon," Southwell said. "When you've got a lack of correct information, and an anxious population with a lot at stake, disinformation is going to flourish. When people are anxious and looking for answers, somebody is going to provide those answers and capitalize on it financially or politically." Misinformation can turn into disinformation when it's still shared by individuals or groups who know it's wrong yet intentionally spread it to cast doubt or stir divisiveness.

Examples of disinformation

One of the most relevant examples of a disinformation campaign is Russia's interference in the 2016 presidential election with help from Facebook ads, pages, and private groups. Russian actors targeted specific geographic regions and swing states to spread propaganda against Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton and sow division among Americans.

Unsubstantiated rumors, gossip, or claims of grand conspiracy can also count as pieces of disinformation. According to Southwell, if you come across information with the following characteristics, you should consider it suspicious:

If it seems too good to be true.

If it plays to your own implicit biases

If it elicits either extreme positive or negative emotions
If it's not properly sourced, or the stats appear out of date

The best, baseline way to interrogate a source of information is to check:

The author

The organization
The date it was published

The evidence
What other sources say

"Always try to figure out where the information is coming from," Southwell said. "Do you know the original source of the information? Is it listed clearly? Can you clearly tell what organization is responsible for this?"

In the New York Times on Wednesday March 31st, 2021, Frank Bruni reported: "

It's customary to praise public officials when they show emotional restraint, muster stoicism in the face of tragedy and project the very calm that they're imploring the rest of us to maintain. We define that as leadership.

But the opposite can at times be even more powerful and important.

Take Dr. Rochelle Walensky's appeal to Americans on Monday.

Walensky, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, was addressing a fresh spike of coronavirus infections around the country, especially in the Northeast. And she let her raw feelings about that be known. She wore her fear on her sleeve.

"*I'm going to lose the script,*" she said, which is the kind of phrase that can be purely theatrical, a pivot from one form of artificiality to another that's just doing a more strenuous masquerade. In her case, though, the pivot was indeed from composure to candor. Her honesty was audible in the quaking of her voice.

She mentioned "*the feeling I have of impending doom.*"

"*Right now,*" she added, "*I'm scared.*" Those were blunt, simple words for a time when muted, fancy ones make absolutely no sense....

With her Monday appeal, Walensky recognized that the complicated psychology of this juncture called for something other than a pro forma statement rendered in the usual political-speak. By embracing her own vulnerability, she emphasized all of ours, and she turned her words into a bigger news story — and thus a louder and more effective alarm — than it otherwise would have been....

Dr. Rochelle Walensky is good bullshit buster!

Bullshit and COVID-19 Vaccines

Another bullshit buster is Miles Park, who writes for NPR/KQED. On March 25, 2021, he presented an article (also available as podcast on KQED website), in a series **Untangling Disinformation: Few Facts, Millions Of Clicks: Fearmongering Vaccine Stories Go Viral Online:**



A doctor fills syringes with the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine this week at the San Gabriel Mission Playhouse in San Gabriel, Calif.
Sarah Reingewirtz/Los Angeles Daily News via Getty Images

The odds of dying after getting a COVID-19 vaccine are virtually nonexistent.

According to recent data from the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention, you're three times more likely to get struck by lightning. But you might not know that from looking at your social media feed.

A new NPR analysis finds that articles connecting vaccines and death have been among the most highly engaged with content online this year, going viral in a way that could hinder people's ability to judge the true risk in getting a shot. The findings also illustrate a broader trend in online misinformation: With social media platforms making more of an effort to take down patently false health claims, bad actors are turning to cherry-picked truths to drive misleading narratives.

Experts say these storylines are much harder for companies to moderate, though they can have the same net effect of creating a distorted and false view of the world. *"It's a really insidious problem,"* said Deen Freelon, a communications professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. *"The social media companies have taken a hard line against disinformation; they have not taken a similarly hard line*

against fallacies." To date, the CDC's reporting system has not received evidence linking any deaths directly to vaccines.

And yet, on almost half of all the days so far in 2021, a story about someone dying after receiving a vaccine shot has been among the most popular vaccine-related articles on social media, according to data from the media intelligence company NewsWhip.

That includes the year's most popular vaccine story: a *South Florida Sun Sentinel* article, which was republished in the *Chicago Tribune*, about a doctor who died a few weeks after receiving the vaccine. The story explicitly notes there has been no link found between the shot and his death, but it has received almost 5 million interactions on Facebook and Twitter nonetheless. "*This problem is not theoretical. It's not hypothetical,*" said Sarah Roberts, an information studies professor at UCLA. "*This thorny issue directly lands in this gray area of an emergent information crisis that has really clear real-world implications.*"

Few deaths, many clicks

By just about any metric, it's clear stories linking deaths to vaccines have spread in such a way that wildly overstates real numbers. Among the more than 85 million people in the U.S. who have now received at least one vaccination shot, less than .0018% of shot recipients have died sometime afterward. Even that small number includes people who were vaccinated while also suffering from other health conditions. Whether they have a vaccine or not, roughly 8,000 people die in the U.S. every day. And as more people get vaccinated, more vaccinated people will continue to die from unrelated causes, which the pharmaceutical company Pfizer alluded to in a statement earlier this year. "*It is important to note that serious adverse events, including deaths that are unrelated to the vaccine, are unfortunately likely to occur at a similar rate as they would in the general population,*" the statement said.

But UNC-Chapel Hill's Freelon said when it comes to conspiratorial thinking, stats and nuance often don't matter as much as tragic stories. "*This is something that we see repeatedly with human cognition,*" Freelon said. "*It's the emphasis on the breathless anecdote and then the discounting of statistics that are much more representative.*"

The largest spike in death-related stories came at a critical time in the vaccine rollout. In January, as the average number of shots administered quadrupled and people frantically searched for information as they considered whether to be vaccinated, it was also the time people were most likely to encounter a story linking a death to vaccination, according to the NPR analysis. Every day from Jan. 7 through Jan. 20, at least one story linking a vaccine to a death was among the 10 most-engaged-with stories about vaccines. NPR analyzed NewsWhip's data by looking at each day's most-engaged-with stories that included the word "*vaccine*" in the headline, summary or metadata. Engagement encompasses how many times an

article was shared, commented on or liked across Facebook, Pinterest and much of Twitter.

On some days, such as Jan. 16 and 17, and March 11 and 12, 25% or more of the top vaccine stories on social media were about a person who died after being vaccinated. This is not because many more people died during these periods; rather it's the result of multiple news outlets writing articles about the same small number of deaths and reaching a larger audience. On March 11 for instance, all six of the stories in the top 20 most-engaged-with vaccine stories were about the same Utah woman who died four days after receiving her second vaccine dose. One Facebook page with 20,000 followers posted a link to the article, with the caption "*I'll pass on the vaccinations. I could care less of anyone's opinion ... this is horrifically sad.*" Another page, with 10,000 followers, posted it saying, "*[V]ery concerned about those getting the poke.*" A few days later, however, the Utah Office of the Medical Examiner issued a statement saying that "*there have been NO DEATHS caused by the Covid-19 vaccines to date in Utah.*" In one of the news stories that was shared with anti-vaccine messages, the actual text of the article described how the father of the woman who died still decided to get the shot himself.

Exploiting the gray areas

The difficulty in moderating these sorts of stories comes from their truthfulness. A woman did die four days after receiving the vaccine in Utah. But there wasn't any causal relationship, according to the state's medical examiner. Social media companies have made it clear that when it comes to sharing true-but-misleading information, they don't want to wade in. "*Content can't always be clearly divided into helpful and harmful,*" Kang-Xing Jin, Facebook head of health, wrote in a recent *San Francisco Chronicle* op-ed. "*It's hard to draw the line on posts that contain people's personal experiences with vaccines.*" But peddlers of misinformation, and even American adversaries, have discovered this gap in content moderation. Russian state media such as RT and Sputnik News shared more than 100 stories linking the Pfizer vaccine to subsequent deaths of recipients, according to a recent report by the Alliance for Securing Democracy.

It's a phenomenon dubbed "*lying through truth*" by Bret Schafer, who wrote the report. "*The [social media] platforms look at an individual tweet from RT saying 23 people died in a nursing home after taking the Pfizer vaccine, and they can't do anything about it because it is technically true, while being wildly misleading,*" Schafer said. "*That seems to be the new strategy.*"

On Thursday, the CEOs of Facebook, Twitter and Google appeared at a U.S. House hearing centered around misinformation that spreads on their platforms. In his opening remarks, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg told lawmakers about the myriad ways the company is fighting to "*keep harmful misinformation about Covid-19 from spreading,*" but the statement focuses only on false claims and makes no mention of these sorts of gray areas. About 30% of Americans continue to express some

hesitancy around getting a COVID- 19 vaccine, according to a recent NPR/PBS *NewsHour*/Marist poll.

Ann Bostrom, an expert on risk perception at the University of Washington, said many of these people are judging the situation incorrectly. For people to calculate correctly the real risk involved in getting a shot, she said, they need to consider the hundreds of thousands who have died because they were not vaccinated against COVID-19, not just a random headline. "*We rarely get the contextual information we need,*" Bostrom said. "*And it's really hard to judge the importance of something without that information*".

As you just read, detecting and controlling bullshit is a Sisyphean task...

On March 30th, 2021, Frida Ghitis published an *Opinion* in *The Washington Post*: ***Which world leader has the worst pandemic record? The competition is fierce.***

A catastrophic pandemic and a calamitous presidency combined to give the United States the world's worst pandemic death toll. That was essentially confirmed by Deborah Birx, President Donald Trump's coronavirus task force coordinator, who [told](#) CNN that most deaths in the United States could have been prevented. And yet — cold comfort — Trump might not have been the worst leader of the pandemic. Others arguably botched the crisis even worse than Trump did, and the list tells you a lot about the state of global governance.

It's hard to top the response of Nicaragua's near-eternal President Daniel Ortega and his wife, who responded to news of a pandemic by calling people into the streets for a festive parade they called "*Love in the Time of Covid-19*" — a perversely fitting allusion to the work of Gabriel García Márquez, whose novels seamlessly blend fact and hallucination. The reckless move horrified human rights activists and scientists alike.

Hard to top it is, but not impossible. There's Jair Bolsonaro, president of Brazil, where the health-care system stands on the verge of collapse, and the unchecked spread of the virus has spawned variants now threatening other struggling countries. Bolsonaro has echoed Trump's claims about hydroxychloroquine, squandering emergency pandemic funds on the useless treatment. He has fired health ministers for refusing to go along with his covid-19 denial and claimed that Brazilians might be immune to the "*little flu*" because they swim in sewage and nothing happens to them. Bolsonaro, who himself became infected, called on Brazilians to protest antiviral measures and joined them in the streets. Few people wore masks, and he gleefully shook hands — sometimes [after](#) coughing into his own. As the pandemic explodes across Brazil, with thousands dying every day, he recently told Brazilians to "*stop whining*" about it.

Another president who caught the virus while playing it down is Mexico's Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Early on, he advised Mexicans to "*live life as usual*." Even after he became infected, he rejected requests to wear a mask. He says he will wear one when corruption is eradicated in Mexico, a distant prospect. As in the United States, mask-wearing became highly politicized, a development that contributed to the climbing death toll. This weekend, Mexican authorities quietly released a report showing the real count is 60 percent higher than the official figure, putting Mexico neck and neck with Brazil for the world's second-highest pandemic death toll, behind the United States. Coincidence? Populism seems to be a comorbidity in a pandemic, raising its deadly toll.

Then there are the dictators, like Belarus's Alexander Lukashenko, who described the pandemic as nothing more than a "psychosis" and prescribed vodka and saunas to prevent it. Lukashenko, who has faced months of mass protests after a disputed election last summer, has blocked common-sense measures to slow down the virus at almost every turn. Yet many Belarusians have resisted his negligent approach — just as many have pushed back against his dictatorship. Ignoring his calamitous advice, individuals practiced social distancing, held crowdfunding campaigns to buy supplies for hospitals and, in the end, have probably helped to keep the virus and the death toll in Belarus from spiraling out of control.

In Turkmenistan, another post-Soviet dictatorship, the government has set a new low for denial by banning mask-wearing and any discussion of the pandemic. The use of the word "*coronavirus*" has reportedly been outlawed in media or health information materials. Turkmenistan still claims it hasn't had any coronavirus cases, a claim no one believes.

In Cambodia, where Prime Minister Hun Sen has held power since 1985 (making him one of the world's longest-ruling heads of government), the first move was denial. He welcomed cruise ship passengers shunned by other countries for fear of the pandemic. Gradually, his response turned to repression, banning criticism and arresting those who complained, then using the emergency to tighten the regime's grip.

In Africa, yet another authoritarian populist, President John Magufuli of Tanzania, also dismissed talk of a global emergency. He told people not to bother with masks or vaccines, claiming that three days of prayer eradicated the virus in Tanzania. To make his point, he claimed to have submitted samples of pawpaw fruit and said they came back positive, ridiculing scientists. Magufuli died this month. Authorities say he died from heart complications, but members of the opposition say they have it on good authority that he died of covid-19.

It's impossible to cover all the outrages by populist demagogues and assorted tyrants. (Apologies if I left out one you found particularly offensive.) Every world

leader made mistakes, but there's something uniquely malignant about the manipulations and deceptions of the most outrageous players. It is sometimes hard to suppress a chuckle when watching the antics of these buffoons. Yet the sense of absurdity is quickly stifled by the realization that their actions have likely contributed to the deaths of [hundreds of thousands](#) around the world — perhaps more.

As for Trump, these other leaders remind us that he wasn't alone in his mishandling of the pandemic. He has a lot of competition for the title of worst pandemic president. But he's still a contender.

Bullshit and Current Politics



A woman wears a T-shirt that reads "Fake News" as protesters gather near the Indiana Statehouse last November for a #StopTheSteal rally and to protest Joe Biden's election victory over Donald J. Trump.

Jeremy Hogan /SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images

In the March 27th, 2021 issue of NPR/KQED transcripts, Miles Parks wrote an article as part his **Untangled Disinformation** series: ***Trump Is No longer Tweeting, But Online Disinformation Isn't Going Away:***

Darren Linvill thought he was prepared for 2020 and the firehose of false information that would come flooding down on the United States during an election year in which the country was bitterly divided.

Linvill is a researcher at Clemson University in South Carolina, and he tracks disinformation networks associated with Russia. In the years following 2016, Linvill shared his work with a number of government entities as the U.S. worked to figure out exactly what Russia did to interfere in that *race*. *He even designed a game called "Spot The Troll" that shows how hard it is to tell a professional provocateur from an extremely opinionated American.*

People often flunk the test, but more importantly Linvill then tracks their online behavior after they take it, and they seem to be more discerning in what information they choose to share and promote. "They realize, *'Oh, maybe I'm not as smart as I thought I was,'*" he says.

Of all the people watching the political landscape in 2020, he should have been ready for whatever disinformation the year had to offer. But he wasn't. *"The minute the pandemic hit,"* says Linvill, *"s*** hit the fan."*

Instead of monitoring a wave of foreign disinformation seeking to sow mistrust in democratic institutions and elections, domestic sources doing the same thing surged instead. *"I'm not even seeing [Russian disinformation] messaging much in English to the same extent that I've seen in the past, because they don't need it,"* Linvill said. *"I mean, the GOP has taken the ball from them and run with it."* In the past year, Americans spent more time than ever online and got more of their information from unreliable or false sources. Even with the de-platforming of former President Donald Trump, experts say the way Americans communicate and receive information online remains broken. It's a crisis that is ripping families apart and led to a violent takeover of the U.S. Capitol in January.

A recent report about that attack from the nonpartisan Election Integrity Partnership concluded that while it was appalling to watch, it should not have been viewed as surprising considering what was happening all year online. *"Many Americans were shocked, but they needn't have been,"* wrote the report's authors.

Disinformation Fuels Distrust And Even Violence At All Levels Of Government

It's also not a once-every-four-years problem. Public health officials are currently competing with a deluge of online disinformation to convince the public that the coronavirus vaccines are safe. *"We are in serious trouble,"* said Joan Donovan, the research director of Harvard University's Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy. *"Disinformation has become an industry, which means the financial incentives and the political gains are now aligned."*

Trump may no longer have access to his 80 million Twitter followers, but the system he capitalized on to spread more than 30,000 falsehoods remains intact. "*We will see more of this,*" she added.

Defining the landscape

The pandemic has been miserable for millions of Americans who have lost loved ones in some cases and jobs in others. But it has inarguably been a boon for the tech world. Twitter and Facebook have both seen meteoric rises in their stock prices since last March, matching a respective growth in time spent on their platforms. That growth may mean a public that is more receptive to conspiratorial thinking and less concerned with truth. Even before the pandemic, engagement with social media was rising. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Reddit have all seen an increase in the amount of time people are spending on their platforms since 2018, according to Activate Consulting, a firm that tracks technology and media trends.

There was also a bigger jump in daily time spent with Internet and media from 2019 to 2020 than in any of the previous years Activate has tracked, according to the company's CEO, Michael Wolf. The average Facebook user now spends about 15.5 hours per month on the platform. And overall, Americans are spending more than 13 total hours per day engaging with some sort of tech or media, whether that is video, gaming, social media, messaging or audio. "*New habits have formed,*" said Wolf. "*It's just not likely that these behaviors are going to go in reverse.*" That means information gleaned via algorithmically generated sources has become an ever more important part of Americans' news diet.

About 1 in 5 Americans say they primarily got their political news from social media in 2020, according to the Pew Research Center. Those who got their information that way were found to engage with conspiracy theories more often than other Americans, while also voicing less concern about the detrimental effects of unreliable information. The problem is more pronounced for younger Americans, who have grown up with the platforms. Of those Americans who relied most on social media for their information about the election, half were under 30 years old.

This week's Election Integrity Partnership report detailed how claims about voting fraud went viral in conservative circles, and subsequent fact checks garnered only a fraction of the same traction. Even though government officials did their best to prepare Americans for what to expect on election night and beyond, conspiracy theorists inspired by Trump and his allies successfully painted those efforts to preempt the problem as further evidence of a rigged system controlled by a "*Deep State.*"

It's not just election-related disinformation on the rise; false narratives about the coronavirus pandemic have also exploded. The misinformation tracking company NewsGuard has compiled a list of more than 400 websites that are spreading lies about the pandemic. The company also found that many of those same websites are

being funded — unintentionally through automated advertising — in part, by some of the world's largest corporations and even the federal government's own Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"If advertising platforms were to provide easy tools for avoiding misinformation websites when placing ads, it would have a significant impact on the business model for such misinformation, vastly reducing the incentive for misinformation publishers to promote false claims," NewsGuard general manager Matt Skibinski wrote in the company's report on the issue.

Chasing a symptom

Throughout his presidency, Trump repeatedly pushed the limits of social media companies' policies when it came to sharing false information. At first, the companies did nothing. Then they added fact check labels, although it remains unclear whether such labels help or hurt the spread of disinformation. But what they didn't do was hamper Trump's ability to speak his mind, even as election officials warned that the sorts of falsehoods he was spreading would lead to violence. *"Someone's going to get hurt, someone's going to get shot, someone's going to get killed,"* Gabriel Sterling, a Georgia election official, said in December, less than a month before then a mob stormed the U.S. Capitol.

As Trump's rate of lies accelerated last year, so too did his Twitter follower count. At the time of Trump's ban from the platform in January, his account had the sixth-largest number of followers. Over the course of 2020, Trump's account saw a 30% increase in followers, from 68.1 million to 88.7 million, according to a research team at the University of Colorado Boulder. Removing him, and thousands of other accounts that spread misinformation, led to an immediate decrease in falsehoods spreading on social media, according to an analysis by the tracking firm Zignal Labs.

But that action won't magically fix the platforms, says Harvard's Donovan. For instance, of the top 20 accounts that shared disinformation around the election using the hashtag #voterfraud, 13 accounts remain active on Twitter, according to a Cornell University data analysis. Donovan says these sorts of accounts, like conservative media personalities Charlie Kirk and Jack Posobiec, both of whom have more than a million followers, can still make a fake narrative go viral almost immediately. *"Of the people who have spread the most noxious lies about the 2020 election, many of them retain their social media accounts on most platforms,"* said Donovan. *"When you don't get the people who are authoring the fictions, the people who are behind the orchestration of that disinformation, then it will eventually come back in different forms."*

Although individual members often raise concerns, Congress has thus far refused to push the social media companies to make wholesale reforms to the designs of their platforms. Those systems have notoriously been found to drive political polarization and reward misinformation with engagement. *"Everywhere along the way that these*

social media platforms have innovated, there has been a lack of accountability and rule-making from politicians," Donovan said. "Mainly because that kind of chaos serves many politicians."

Timeline for a fix

For Whitney Phillips, a disinformation researcher at Syracuse, there is some reason for optimism. Even if it took one election with an unprecedented level of foreign interference, and another that concluded with violence at the U.S. Capitol, people are at least beginning to recognize that there's a problem.

"When I started doing this research in 2008, there was such an enormous amount of resistance that anything bad that happened on the Internet was even real," Phillips said. "And it wasn't until really 2017 that there was a critical mass of people who were like 'maybe hate speech on the Internet isn't good.' Maybe these things might correspond into real world action. ... Now there's really little denying the dangers of a dysfunctional information ecosystem."

Much of her new book, co-written with Ryan Milner, focuses on the role memes have played in normalizing hate speech and racism, by layering humor or irony on top of it. When she's asked how much more moderation the major companies need to do to fix the current state of information in the U.S., she says the question misses the point. A future healthy information environment probably doesn't involve Facebook or Twitter at all, at least in anything close to their current forms. It involves a completely redesigned Internet. *"My guess is that it will take us 50 years,"* she says.

That has meant she's shifted her focus away from platform moderation and toward K-12 education so that future generations might be better equipped to fix what they are left with: systems that let falsehoods spread like wildfire, without regard to truth. *"Our problem is that our networks are working exactly as they were designed to work. They work great. They're not broken at all,"* she said. *"So, in order to equip people to navigate these networks that are designed to set us up to be in hell, basically we've got to think about what we are teaching young people."*

What happens between now and 50 years from now she's unsure about. Those users who have been recently radicalized, for instance, may find new ways to gather online if they are kicked off the major platforms. *"Something is going to grow from this,"* she said. *"What exactly is hard to say. But I have a feeling that it's not going to be awesome."*

I confess than when talking -and writing- about bullshit, one of my favorite bullshit busters is **satire**. The *Bleeding-Heart Liberal Marine* (whoever she is) published in **Muddy'um**, on February 16, 2021 4-minute read piece worth your time titled **The Donald John Trump Presidential library And Adult Bookstore – Power to the Peep Hole:**



Via Twitter

After a long, hard search, in one masterstroke, a site for The Donald John Trump Presidential Library finally has a happy ending. In honor of Hump Day, The Office of the Failed Former President announced a deal to purchase Fantasy Island Adult Books. Located in the red-light district of *'Phillydelphia'* next to Four Seasons Total Landscaping, the proposed center will function as a cult shrine, presidential library, and novelty sex shop—alleviating the need for Trump to blow his entire wad on costly renovations.

The year-long search nearly went limp after the porn-again Christian president aroused a bunch of dicks who penetrated the bowels of the Capitol in an attempt to screw democracy. Several companies involved in the funny business abruptly pulled out, leaving the project a hot mess. Sources deep inside Trump's organization feared the failed former POTUS could no longer keep it up.

In one three-way meeting, Trump railed and exploded about being back-doored repeatedly. Determined to go all the way, he ordered those working under him to get busy and bang it out, even if they had to move the center to *"Thighland."* A rough

review process thrust The Philadelphia Lust-Related Licensing Board into the whole cock-up as the normally dominant power brokers were forced to just watch and wait for a climax like submissive little cucks. Ultimately Trump was able to grease the heads of the licensing board with cash payments that lubricated the process. A large package of funding for the executive flesh palace and MAGAlomania museum is expected to be funneled from Trump's "*Stop the Steal*" slush fund once the dirty money has undergone extensive laundering through offshore bank accounts via multiple shell corporations owned by Jared Kushner.

Once erected, the presidential phallus facility will house countless shredded documents from the Trump Era. It will feature loads of attractions that are unique for presidential libraries, including a dismantled border wall scrapyards, a Matt Gaetz glory hole, an underground replica of Trump's sex-dungeon panic-bunker, an Eric Trump paste-eating kids zone, a hall of traitors wax figure walkway with molded replicas of co-conspirators like Michael Flynn and Roger Stone, a Kimberly Guilfoyle champagne lap-dance room, a Stormy Daniels movie retrospective, and VIP nudie booths for 'yuge' donors who purchase the Golden Shower Putin Package. Jason Miller, Senior Jizz Mopper and Spokesman for the double-impeached president, said the seedy adult bookstore and presidential library would continue to sell popular items like DVDs, lotions, dildos, nipple clamps, strap-ons, cock cages, vibrators, edible panties, penis rings, clone-a-willy molding kits, MAGA hats, kegel balls, bondage chains, ball gags, prostate stimulators, anal probers, sex swings, handcuffs, anal beads, glass wands, inflatable Melania dolls, flesh lassos, vagina weights, oral sex candy, stroker sleeves, personal massagers, electro-stimulators, magic balls, double fistfisters, fetish rocking chairs, and autographed photos of past celebrity patrons like Mike Pence.

"Like a rubber fisting mitten, Fantasy Island Adult Books was the perfect fit," Miller explained. *"This is going to be one sexy-ass presidential library where very fine people will make America gush again."* Supporters of the project hope the Trump-themed jerk store will pump capital into the area with a rise in jobs for area strippers and an influx of cash from perverted "*patriots*" with a penchant for splurging on cheap trinkets. Trump explained that he expects everyone who visits will want sloppy seconds.

"The Donald J. Trump Presidential Library and Adult Bookstore is going to be the classiest boom-boom room and flophouse in all of South Philly. There's never been anything like it," Trump added. *"People from around the country will flock here to learn about my great administration, or just to pick up a dildo. I don't use them. I've never needed them. But we'll have all kinds of merchandise for sale. The preorders for the Lindsey Graham butt-plugs alone are through the roof."*

Other locals were more circumspect about the center. A co-owner of Four Season Total Landscaping, who asked to remain nameless, expressed their doubts about the presidential library. *"I don't want those MAGA wankers coming here. Fantasy Island is a classy joint, and the Trump's will sully it."*

Ground is set to be broken soon with the first holes being dug in late spring. Shyster and Keister Construction Company will employ hundreds of underpaid, undocumented immigrants to renovate the sex shop before they are reported to ICE as illegals.



Eric Trump forgets how to operate a shovel—via Twitter

Trump is reportedly building an extra “*crash pad*” above the dirty bookstore, which sources close to the former Twitter influencer say he plans to live in once Melania has divorced him, his lenders have fucked him, and he is tossed out of Mar-a-Lago by local Palm Beach residents.

This satire sounds very Trumpian, and *TRUE!* Time will tell... But, according to *The Independent*, a respected UK newspaper: Donald Trump made more than 30,000 false or misleading statements during his four years as president of the United States, analysis suggests. And now that he is a former president, some scientists -finally- tell the truth:

Former White House COVID-19 response coordinator Deborah Birx said in an interview aired on CNN on Sunday March 28, 2021 that she had a "very

uncomfortable" conversation with former President Trump following a television interview last year in which she warned of a dire situation amid the pandemic. Speaking with CNN's Sanjay Gupta in an interview aired Sunday evening March 28, Birx explained that an August CNN interview during which she warned of the dangers of COVID-19 even to rural and isolated communities drew ire from "everybody in the White House." "The CNN report in August, that got horrible pushback. That was a very difficult time because everybody in the White House was upset with that interview and the clarity I brought about the epidemic," Birx said.

Asked by Gupta what the response was from the Trump administration, Birx responded, *"Well, I got called by the president." "I think you've heard other conversations other people have posted with the president. I would say it was even more direct than what people have heard," Birx said, describing the conversation. "It was very uncomfortable, very direct, very difficult to hear," Birx added.*

"Were you threatened?" Gupta asked. "I would say it was a very uncomfortable conversation," she answered after a long pause.

Birx's comments reveal some of the conflict between the former president and his own COVID-19 response team. Anthony Fauci has said the former president had a *"chilling"* effect on scientists working to provide accurate data about the pandemic. *"I didn't want to be at odds with the president because I have a lot of respect for the office of the presidency, but there was conflict at different levels with different people and different organizations and a lot of pressure being put on to do things that just are not compatible with the science,"* Fauci said in January.

Another blatant, and imposed lie was about his real sickness condition when he was hospitalized at Walter Reed Hospital for SARS-Cov-2 infection:

Former President Donald Trump was, in fact, much sicker than the White House publicly let on in the first few days after being diagnosed with Covid-19 during the final stretch of the 2020 campaign.

According to a long and detailed review in the *New York Times*, Trump was found to have extremely low blood oxygen levels and "infiltrates" in his lungs in the days before he was moved to Walter Reed Medical Center. The latter condition is commonly associated with pneumonia patients and occurs when lungs are inflamed and contain invasive fluid or bacteria.

As a result of these red flags, White House officials were concerned that the president would need to be placed on a ventilator — a sign of a severe case of coronavirus — once he was admitted into Water Reed. But these shocking details were never made public with Election Day less than five weeks away. Besides, Hospital records show that his weight was a whopping 322 pounds (146 kilos!). Trump left the hospital after three days. After receiving experimental (and tremendously expensive) experimental treatments.



c. Daily Kos

Bullshit Elsewhere

But the United States are not the only country lead by bullshitters. Almost every continent -with the possible exception of the South Pacific, and parts of Asia- suffer large numbers of deaths that could have been prevented. A recent article (see reference) reports on **South America's Superspreader event:**

LIMA, Peru — The doctor watched the patients stream into his intensive care unit with a sense of dread. **For weeks, César Salomé, a physician in Lima's Hospital Mongrut, had followed the chilling reports. A new coronavirus variant, spawned in the Amazon rainforest, had stormed Brazil and driven its health system to the brink of collapse.** Now his patients, too, were arriving far sicker, their lungs saturated with disease, and dying within days. Even the young and healthy didn't appear protected. The new variant, he realized, was here.

The P.1 variant, which packs a suite of mutations that makes it more transmissible and potentially more dangerous, is no longer just Brazil's problem. **It's South America's problem — and the world's. In recent weeks, it has been carried across rivers and over borders, evading restrictive measures meant to curb its**

advance to help fuel a coronavirus surge across the continent. There is mounting anxiety in parts of South America that P.1 could quickly become the dominant variant, transporting Brazil's humanitarian disaster — patients languishing without care, a skyrocketing death toll — into their countries.

"It's spreading," said Julio Castro, a Venezuelan infectious-disease expert. *"It's impossible to stop."*

In Lima, scientists have detected the variant in 40 percent of coronavirus cases. In Uruguay, it's been found in 30 percent. In Paraguay, officials say half of cases at the border with Brazil are P.1. **Other South American countries — Colombia, Argentina, Venezuela, Chile — have discovered it in their territories.** Limitations in genomic sequencing have made it difficult to know the variant's true breadth, but it has been identified in more than two dozen countries, from Japan to the United States.

The leader in this criminal bullshit is **Jair Bolsonaro**, a former officer in the Brazilian army -the one that ruined the country from April 1964 until mid-March 1965.



Depois de fodo mundo,
sobre a obra de Carlo Colodi

c. Aroeira

On 7 July 2020, Bolsonaro revealed that he had tested positive for COVID-19. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil, Bolsonaro and his administration have been accused of downplaying the crisis while the number of people infected by the virus in the country climbed exponentially by mid-2020. The president claimed that the coronavirus is no more deadly than the "*common flu*" and that his priority is the economic recovery of the nation rather than the health crisis. He has constantly accused political opponents and the press of exaggerating the threat of the virus. On 25 July 2020, Bolsonaro announced that he had tested negative for COVID-19 in a fourth test since being diagnosed, although the following week he indicated that he had also started suffering from "*mold in the lung*". Even so, he stated his opposition to mandatory vaccination against COVID-19. In August 2020, in the middle of the pandemic, Bolsonaro's popularity bounced back and showed signs of recovery, with the president registering his highest approval rating since his inauguration. In early 2021, his approval ratings fell again, mostly due to the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccination controversies, and concurrent economic crisis that evolved under his watch.

More recently, on April 7th, 2021, Elliot Hannon, in **Slate** reported that ***With Daily Deaths Topping 4,000, Brazil's COVID-19 Outbreak Is Out of Control:***



Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro talks to supporters as he leaves the Presidential Palace in Brasilia on March 31.
Evaristo Sa/Getty Images

Brazil's battle with the coronavirus continues to careen in the wrong direction as the country, on Tuesday, set a new record in daily fatalities, topping 4,000 recorded deaths in a 24-hour span. With a new, more contagious local variant on the loose and lackadaisical national leadership under President Jair Bolsonaro, the country is lining up to surpass the U.S. death total with just two-thirds of the population. The growing calamity of the uncontrolled outbreak was made stark Tuesday when the country's ministry of health tallied a record 4,195 COVID-19 deaths, after setting new daily highs in fatalities each week since last February.

The virus has already claimed 337,000 lives in Brazil, making the South American nation second only to the U.S. globally in recorded cases and deaths. As infection and death rates in the U.S. have started to fall, however, Brazil is now the epicenter of the pandemic and contributes roughly one out of every four coronavirus deaths worldwide, according to a Reuters analysis. *"It's a biological Fukushima,"* Miguel Nicolelis, a Brazilian doctor and professor at Duke University, told Reuters. *"It's a nuclear reactor that has set off a chain reaction and is out of control."*

And the same day, Reuters Health Information, after quoting Professor Miguel Nicolelis, added:

Right-wing President Jair Bolsonaro has pushed back against mask-wearing and lockdowns that public health experts consider necessary. The country dragged its feet last year as the world raced to secure vaccines, slowing the launch of a national immunization program. With weak measures failing to combat contagion, Brazil's COVID-19 cases and deaths are accumulating faster than ever. On the other hand, a widespread U.S. vaccination campaign is rapidly curtailing what has been the world's deadliest outbreak.

Nicolelis and Christovam Barcellos, a researcher at Brazilian medical institute Fiocruz, are separately predicting that Brazil could surpass the United States in both overall deaths and the record for average deaths per day.

As soon as next week, Brazil may break the record U.S. seven-day average for deaths, forecasts the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington. The U.S. average for daily deaths peaked at 3,285 in January. The IHME forecast does not currently extend beyond July 1, when it projects Brazil could reach 563,000 deaths, compared with 609,000 U.S. casualties expected by then.

But bullshit knows no borders, claims no patriotism: it is also prevalent in Western Europe -although not in every country. One country that is struggling (and currently losing) with COVID-19 is France. There there are two academic who got notoriety, and many followers for blatant Bullshit: Didier Raoult, of Marseille, and Christian Perronne -formerly-of the University of Versailles-Quentin. Leonid Schneider, an independent science journalist, with around 13

years of biomedical research experience in molecular cell biology, stem cells and cancer research, pillorizes both in an article in *For Better Science* last October 26, 2020; enjoy!

You all know Didier Raoult, the genius saint of Marseille who saved the world from COVID-19 with the miracle cure of chloroquine/hydroxychloroquine. But now we will meet another French male intellectual, a constant feature on national TV, and a #HCQwOrks friend of Raoult's from Paris, Christian Perronne, professor of infectious diseases at the University of Versailles-St Quentin. Smut Clyde will tell you what else Perronne is up to, and what kind of interesting people he befriended on his quest to cure the elusive mystery malaise of Chronic Lyme Disease.

Professor Perronne is presently the biggest promoter of Raoult's coronavirus therapy on French media. Earlier this year he even published his own little clinical study with hydroxychloroquine as COVID-19 lifesaver. It was a preprint which Raoult endorsed and which Perronne then retracted, with a request for the preprint not to be cited. All this is funny because, according to a blog post by Alexander Samuel, Perronne used hydroxychloroquine (sold in France as Plaquenil) and azithromycin (sold as Zythromax) for a very different purpose before: to treat... **autism**. The blog references this Twitter thread:

"But [Perronne] is best known for being a founding member of Chronimed, a group of doctors around [Nobel Prize winner and quackery enthusiast Luc] Montagnier, who have "treated" thousands of long-term autistic children with cocktails of antibiotics, antifungals and antiparasitics. He talks about it in his book and at conferences (2h02m50s):

Suzanne Ruhlmann reported it on her twitter account with in particular these elements showing that Dr Perronne is indeed a member of Chronimed, that he has done tests on autistic children and that doctors from the Chronimed network have even prescribed hydroxychloroquine /azithromycin in this context to autistic children."

The Chronimed doctors also treat Lyme, which gets us closer to the post by Smut Clyde, because Chronic Lyme Disease is what Perronne is really famous for (or notorious, if you like). Unlike the actually existing Lyme Disease or Lyme borreliosis, which is a tick-borne infection, Chronic Lyme Disease is a stealthy pandemic, which appears even in absence of ticks, and which is undiagnosable by standard laboratory means because of a giant conspiracy and is curable only by finest quackery. In 2016, Perronne spearheaded a Chronic Lyme Disease appeal by 100 fellow doctors, demanding "public funding", including to "**improve diagnostic tests, which are currently unreliable**" and a "**Stop of the prosecution of doctors who do not follow official recommendations (2006 consensus) to treat their patients**". The campaign was covered by the French newspaper *L'Obs*, an interview with Perronne followed.



Later, there was a kind of 188-page long Manifesto in 2018, where numerous Chronic Lyme patients gathered whom Smut Clyde will introduce to you at his leisure. Here a quote: *"In France in February 2017, a wheelchair-bound patient long diagnosed with neurodegenerative illness was 'cured' by Prof. Christian Perronne after three months of antimicrobial treatment and began to ski again."*

Now, girls and boys, remember your Sunday school, how the lame rose to walk? Exactly. But Professor Perronne made the lame ski, so beat this, Jesus. But then again, Professor Raoult raised the dead with chloroquine, so there.

Raoult may be a deranged looney, but he was known to be a strong opponent of the Chronic Lyme Disease diagnosis (he might have changed his mind, who knows). Shortly after Perronne's campaign in 2016, Raoult raged against *"Lyme Disease Zombies"* in an opinion piece. But now that hydroxychloroquine enthusiast Perronne keeps advocating for Raoult's COVID-19 all over national TV, Raoult sends direct and indirect support to the colleague he used to despise. For example, the glowing Perronne admiration over Twitter from Raoult's own human sock puppet at IHU Marseille, Eric Chabrière, is quite telling.

The grand Chronic Lyme Disease doctor, who claims to have “*treated a lot of people*” and “*saved hundreds of people in distress, disabled and even on the verge of suicide*”, does not publish much on this topic. Presently, there are 16 entries on PubMed in this regard, almost exclusively opinion pieces, two of which in *Medical Hypotheses*, an Elsevier journal popular with looneys and quacks. When asked by journalists as to why there were hardly any research papers, Perronne replied: “*I was the victim of fierce censorship*”.

In the same article, Perronne explained that Lyme Disease was introduced to US by a Nazi bacteriologist who smuggled in the ticks on behalf of US military after WWII, and there is a huge cover-up going on, with Perronne obviously as the main victim. A source at the French Ministry of Health was quoted describing Perronne as a “*genius*”, utterly unironically. No wonder the genius used to act as advisor to same ministry and president of the High Council of Public Health. The most recent study by Perronne, from early 2020, claims to have developed a PCR detection technology for Chronic Lyme Disease. It appeared in *Frontiers*, where it is in a good company. In 2012, Perronne wrote in *The Lancet*, as reply to Chronic Lyme Disease sceptics: “*Paul Auwaerter and colleagues compare some Lyme disease activists who use non-evidence-based arguments with anti-HIV or antivaccination extremists. Their Personal View shows that unscientific thinking and malpractice occur in many specialties. Such a focus has unfortunately resulted in suppression of legitimate and necessary scientific debate about the management of syndromes of unclear aetiology, which sometimes occur after a previously proven episode of Lyme disease or tick bites.*”

Now Smut Clyde does the same (although he first profusely pays his disrespect to various other Lyme quacks, in particular Sin Hang Lee). How can Professor Perronne take such science-denialists like Smut Clyde seriously?

Seriously, **THOUSANDS of innocent people are dying EVERYDAY** in large part because of Bullshit propagated (and believed) by uninformed or ***misinformed*** activists. Bullshit kills!

Jean de La Fontaine was prescient (or just an astute observer) when he wrote his fable:

Jean de La Fontaine

Les Animaux Malades de la Peste

An evil that spreads terror,

Evil that Heaven in its fury
Invented to punish the crimes of the earth,
The Plague (since it must be called by its name)
Able to enrich Acheron in one day,
Waged war on animals.

They did not all die, but all were struck:

We did not see any occupied
To seek the support of a dying life.
No food aroused their envy.
Neither wolves nor foxes spied
The sweet and innocent prey.
The Doves were fleeing:
More love, leaving more joy.

Fighting Bullshit

We underestimate the stupid, the bullshitter, and we do so at our own peril. That's what Carlo M Cipolla, a professor of economic history at the University of California stated in an essay outlining the **Five Fundamental Laws** of a force he perceived as humanity's greatest existential threat: **Stupidity**.



Not just a danger to themselves. Photo by Reuters/Susana Vera

Stupid people, Carlo M. Cipolla explained, share several identifying traits: they are abundant, they are irrational, and they cause problems for others without apparent benefit to themselves, thereby lowering society's total well-being. There are no defenses against stupidity, argued the Italian-born professor, who died in 2000. The only way a society can avoid being crushed by the burden of its idiots is if the non-stupid work even harder to offset the losses of their stupid brethren.

Let's take a look at Cipolla's five basic laws of human stupidity:

Law 1: Always and inevitably everyone underestimates the number of stupid individuals in circulation.

No matter how many idiots you suspect yourself surrounded by, Cipolla wrote, you are invariably lowballing the total. This problem is compounded by biased assumptions that certain people are intelligent based on superficial factors like their job, education level, or other traits we believe to be exclusive of stupidity. They aren't. Which takes us to:

Law 2: The probability that a certain person be stupid is independent of any other characteristic of that person.

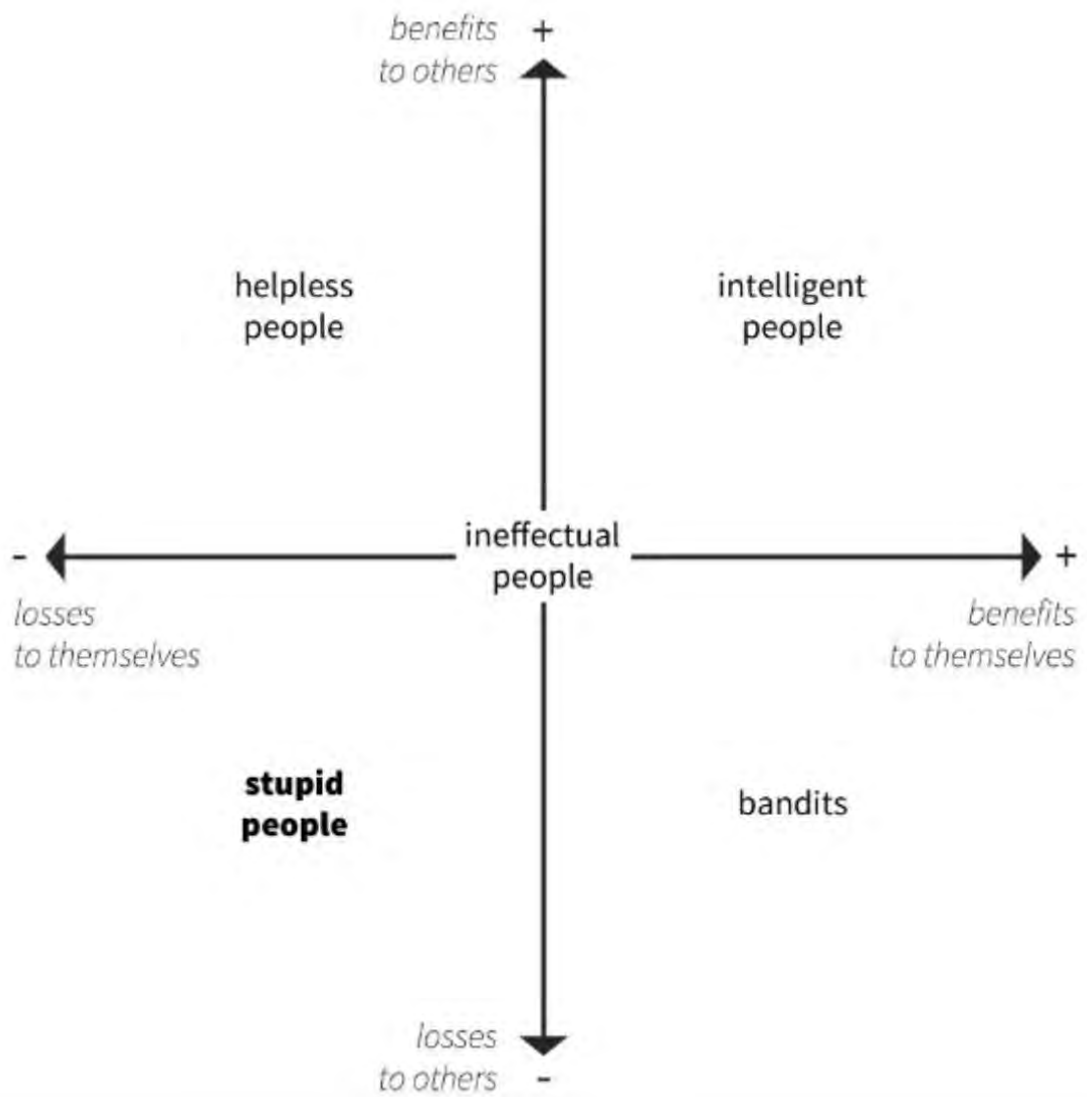
Cipolla posits stupidity is a variable that remains constant across all populations. Every category one can imagine—gender, race, nationality, education level, income—possesses a fixed percentage of stupid people. There are stupid college professors. There are stupid people at Davos and at the UN General Assembly. There are stupid people in every nation on earth. How numerous are the stupid amongst us? It's impossible to say. And any guess would almost certainly violate the first law, anyway.

Law 3. A stupid person is a person who causes losses to another person or to a group of persons while himself deriving no gain and even possibly incurring losses.

Cipolla called this one the Golden Law of stupidity. A stupid person, according to the economist, is one who causes problems for others without any clear benefit to himself.

The uncle unable to stop himself from posting fake news articles to Facebook? Stupid. The customer service representative who keeps you on the phone for an hour, hangs up on you twice, and somehow still manages to screw up your account? Stupid.

This law also introduces three other phenotypes that Cipolla says co-exist alongside stupidity. First there is the intelligent person, whose actions benefit both himself and others. Then there is the bandit, who benefits himself at others' expense. And lastly there is the helpless person, whose actions enrich others at his own expense. Cipolla imagined the four types along a graph, like this:



Stupidity, graphed. Photo by Vincedevries on Wikimedia, licensed under CC-BY-SA 4.0

The non-stupid are a flawed and inconsistent bunch. Sometimes we act intelligently, sometimes we are selfish bandits, sometimes we act helplessly and are taken advantage of by others, and sometimes we're a bit of both. The stupid, in comparison, are paragons of consistency, acting at all times with unyielding idiocy.

However, consistent stupidity is the only consistent thing about the stupid. This is what makes stupid people so dangerous. Cipolla explains:

Essentially stupid people are dangerous and damaging because reasonable people find it difficult to imagine and understand unreasonable behavior. An intelligent person may understand the logic of a bandit. The bandit's actions follow a pattern of

rationality: nasty rationality, if you like, but still rationality. The bandit wants a plus on his account. Since he is not intelligent enough to devise ways of obtaining the plus as well as providing you with a plus, he will produce his plus by causing a minus to appear on your account. All this is bad, but it is rational and if you are rational, you can predict it. You can foresee a bandit's actions, his nasty maneuvers and ugly aspirations and often can build up your defenses.

With a stupid person all this is absolutely impossible as explained by the Third Basic Law. A stupid creature will harass you for no reason, for no advantage, without any plan or scheme and at the most improbable times and places. You have no rational way of telling if and when and how and why the stupid creature attacks. When confronted with a stupid individual you are completely at his mercy.

All of which leads us to:

Law 4: Non-stupid people always underestimate the damaging power of stupid individuals. In particular non-stupid people constantly forget that at all times and places and under any circumstances to deal and/or associate with stupid people always turns out to be a costly mistake.

We underestimate the stupid, and we do so at our own peril. This brings us to the fifth and final law:

Law 5: A stupid person is the most dangerous type of person.

And its corollary:

A stupid person is more dangerous than a bandit.

We can do nothing about the stupid. The difference between societies that collapse under the weight of their stupid **citizens** and those who transcend them are the makeup of the non-stupid. Those progressing in spite of their stupid possess a high proportion of people acting intelligently, those who counterbalance the stupid's losses by bringing about gains for themselves and their fellows.

Declining societies have the same percentage of stupid people as successful ones. But they also have high percentages of helpless people and, Cipolla writes, "*an alarming proliferation of the bandits with overtones of stupidity.*"

"Such change in the composition of the non-stupid population inevitably strengthens the destructive power of the [stupid] fraction and makes decline a certainty," Cipolla concludes. *"And the country goes to Hell."*

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(2019). He published in the December 16th, 2020 of *Psyche Ideas* an Essay: **On the moral obligation to stop shit-stirring:**



Photo by Borthwick Institute for Archives/Heritage Images/Getty

Utilitarianism – the idea that we should evaluate the moral worth of an action by its consequences, and that the best actions are those that bring about the most good for the most people – is the ideal public morality for our troubled age. It requires us to focus not only on what we do, but also on what we didn't do but might have done. Non-action in the face of threats such as climate change, pandemics and technologically facilitated extremism has moral implications of its own, and it's utilitarianism that offers the most emphatic responses to these problems.

But philosophers often don't do a good job of discussing utilitarianism. They traffic in astounding thought-experiments – is it right to harmlessly kill your newborn infant if it's screaming a bit too much? Should you take drugs that make you a better, more caring parent? – that can produce shocking answers. Some critics of utilitarianism take these outlandish ideas as a victory: any ethical theory that countenances infanticide must be wrong. But '*gotcha*' answers to ethical enquiries about how to raise, or not raise, kids are a triumph of a philosophical style that prioritizes aggravation over moral substance. Those who offer them are not engaged in good-faith philosophical debate. They're engaged in what I call '*moral shit-stirring*'.

The philosopher Harry Frankfurt's essay *'On Bullshit'* (1986) has a memorable opening: ***'One of the most salient features of our culture is that there is so much bullshit.'*** He characterizes bullshit as emanating from a lack of regard for the truth, and suggests that this might make it even worse than lying. The bullshitter, he explains, *'does not reject the authority of the truth, as the liar does, and oppose himself to it. He pays no attention to it at all. By virtue of this, bullshit is a greater enemy of the truth than lies are.'* Similarly, shit-stirring has become the great enemy of good-faith debate in contemporary philosophical ethics.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *'shit-stir'* as an *'attempt to provoke or aggravate, esp. without serious intent'*. In the kind of shit-stirring that interests me here, provocation or aggravation is carried out through speech acts that have the grammatical form of advice even though they're not actually intended to help those to whom the purported advice is offered. When you offer sincere advice, you typically hope that it will be acted on. But this isn't the case with shit-stirring.

If you shit-stir a bald person by suggesting that they get hair plugs, you don't expect them to calmly agree and ask for your help in securing such services. If your target *did* respond in that way, you would have reason to believe that your attempt at shit-stirring had failed. The goal was to unsettle the target, not to offer useful advice. Indeed, it would be you as the shit-stirrer who ends up feeling unsettled, or at least put on the spot. How should you know where to find the best information about hair plugs? Shit-stirrers differ from bullshitters in that they actually do pay close attention to the truth. Uncomfortable truths about an interlocutor are typically more unsettling than patent falsehoods. Shit-stirring a very tall person about their shortness of stature isn't an especially effective way to aggravate them. More unsettling would be to advise a clinically obese person that he eat less.

Owing to Donald Trump's presidency, there has been a boom in academic reflections on bullshit. Trump's flagrant disregard for the truth makes him an effective bullshitter. But this same trait makes him less effective as a shit-stirrer. Shit-stirring differs from mere insulting (or *'trash-talking'*). The search for statements designed to unsettle one's target requires an interest in the truth beyond what a bullshit artist is capable of mustering. But even though shit-stirrers care more about the truth than bullshitters do, shit-stirring can be a worse offence. To adapt Frankfurt's reasoning, shit-stirring is a greater enemy of sincere advice than bullshit is. Bullshitting, after all, can have a serious moral purpose that's almost always absent from the shit-stirrer's view of truth as an expedient – a mere means to aggravate someone.

My first example of moral shit-stirring concerns the idea of painlessly killing newborns. This line of thinking originated with Michael Tooley's article *'Abortion and Infanticide'* (1972), and was followed by arguments from other philosophers, particularly those with utilitarian sympathies, including Peter Singer, Jeff McMahan and John Harris. In 2013, Alberto Giubilini and Francesca Minerva introduced the marketing novelty of the label *'after-birth abortion'* to essentially repackage Tooley's

arguments. Here's a distillation of the common theme of infanticide apologists: no one who has heard a newborn scream can doubt its capacity to suffer. The philosopher Jeremy Bentham's question '*Can they suffer?*' clearly prompts us to give moral weight to this suffering. But a newborn doesn't yet have any awareness of itself as a being distinct from its environment, nor any understanding that it has a potential future. It is not a person, in that sense, and so it cannot be harmed by painlessly losing a contingent future. Painlessly killing a newborn is therefore morally distinct from painlessly killing a person, a sentient being with the capacity to form preferences about its future. The argument concludes with the contention that the infant dies an entirely harmless death.

In other cases of shit-stirring, a provocative statement is offered initially as an undemanding request only to be made more provocative by being upgraded to a moral obligation. An example of this can be found in the moral '*debate*' over drugs that strengthen – or weaken – romantic attachments. In their book *Love Drugs: The Chemical Future of Relationships* (2020), Brian Earp and Julian Savulescu argue that we should use pharmaceuticals to preserve and strengthen relationships worth saving, and to expedite the end of unwanted relationships. Earp and Savulescu might have wanted to sound provocative and yet the idea that an informed couple might take a drug with side-effects that they deem acceptable to improve their relationship seems uncontroversial. The shock value of love drugs lies in their pharmacological properties, not in the idea that – if they work and are safe – people should be free to try them. What makes these any different from Viagra? As Elizabeth Robson puts it in her review of *Love Drugs*, Earp and Savulescu come off as '*agony uncles*', peddling more self-help than philosophy. But remember, the last thing a moral shit-stirrer wants is for the reader to shrug her shoulders and say: '*Meh, seems right to me.*' So why not replace a bland permission with a provocative obligation, as Earp and Savulescu together with Anders Sandberg do in a paper from 2012, where they argue that, if a couple has dependent children and decides to abstain from love drugs, supposing they are safe and effective, they actually fail in their parental duties by needlessly exposing their children to the proven harms of marital strife or divorce. Not taking love drugs thus becomes a form of child abuse by omission. For obvious reasons, this line of argument is much more aggravating than gently offering moral permission to take love drugs.

Why am I so sure that this isn't earnest moral advice? Why shouldn't those arguing for permission to painlessly kill their newborn be taken seriously? For starters, those making these arguments almost always offer a series of excuses for not acting on their philosophical conclusions. Giubilini and Minerva don't want you to kill your baby, and they appear not to want you to do so even if you've had second thoughts about parenthood. Earp, Savulescu and Sandberg really don't want to force parents to take love drugs. They're like classroom monitors who sternly announce that you must never litter, even as they make it clear that they will accept almost any excuse for littering. Moreover, in response to the anger generated by their defense of after-birth abortion, Giubilini and Minerva disavowed any interest in making infanticide legal, and pointed out that they are just academic philosophers, not policymakers.

Earp, Savulescu and Sandberg say that their obligation should not be enforced. But in this case, it's hard to see how the obligations they previously elevated are any different from the self-help suggestion that love drugs are a fun idea.

To be sure, there is some value in these provocations. When I first encountered Tooley's defense of infanticide, I was morally confounded. On the one hand, I found his arguments about personhood persuasive. But, on the other hand, I would have been horrified to hear that the nice young couple next door had had enough of their infant's crying and decided to act on Tooley's conclusion. These occasions of moral confounding serve as a prompt to reflect more deeply on moral beliefs.

What, then, is the problem with moral shit-stirring? The sentence that opens Frankfurt's paper is instructive. The problem with *'our culture is that there is so much bullshit'*. Frankfurt seems to accept that there's always going to be some bullshit. The problem is when there's too much. The same warning applies to shit-stirring. Sometimes, non-serious advice can be useful and fun. Consider the joke advice in a wedding speech: *'Never go to bed angry. Stay up and fight all night.'* Perhaps this will cause the newlyweds to reflect on their relationship in therapeutic ways. But we're supposed to understand that amusing advice delivered as part of a wedding speech works less well when offered by a marriage counsellor to a distressed couple. There's a big problem when there's too much shit-stirring in purportedly serious academic discussions of morality.

Philosophers chasing Google Scholar citations know that arguments for after-birth abortion and obligatory love drugs will elicit responses. And if utilitarianism is your moral starting point, it's easy to provoke. Utilitarianism is a powerful morality, a philosophical blowtorch that can be misdirected. Consider, for example, a (so-far fictitious) paper entitled *'On the Obligation to Be a Paedophile'*, arguing that, although paedophilia typically harms children, there are circumstances in which it can be part of a relationship that brings net benefits to a child and society. Such relationships seem to have existed in Ancient Greece. If you manage to get this paper published – say in one of the bioethics journals that cover the apologetics of infanticide – expect good results on Google Scholar. Why not announce your paper's publication on Twitter? *'Philosopher Defends Paedophilia!'* would be great clickbait – better even than the scatological title of this piece.

It's fun to provoke. Provocation can lead to reflection, which is typically a good thing. But, right now, we have a great need for utilitarianism's rigorous focus on all the consequences of our actions – and inactions. We need a powerful public morality to tell us to take immediate action on climate change, wealth inequality and racism. Utilitarianism's distinctive focus on the consequences of not acting is especially important. There are far too many people who reflect that, since they aren't deliberately harming the environment and aren't personally racist, they are therefore absolved from acting. There's a problem when it seems reasonable to respond to a utilitarian's demand that one think about what one could do by saying: *'I think I understand your utilitarian argument for a moral obligation to immediately*

address climate change, but isn't utilitarianism the theory that says it's fine to kill babies? Why should I listen to that?'

Now we live in a game- changing world; **Artificial Intelligence**, and its corollaries -e.g., the language algorithm GPT-3- could continue our descent into a post-truth world, and -as Raphaël Millière puts it in the September 9th, 2020 issue of *Nautilus*- **Welcome to the Next Level of Bullshit.**

"One of the most salient features of our culture is that there is so much bullshit." These are the opening words of the short book *On Bullshit*, written by the philosopher Harry Frankfurt. Fifteen years after the publication of this surprise bestseller, the rapid progress of research on artificial intelligence is forcing us to reconsider our conception of bullshit as a hallmark of human speech, with troubling implications. What do philosophical reflections on bullshit have to do with algorithms? As it turns out, quite a lot.

In May this year the company OpenAI, co-founded by Elon Musk in 2015, introduced a new language model called GPT-3 (for "*Generative Pre-trained Transformer 3*"). It took the tech world by storm. On the surface, GPT-3 is like a supercharged version of the autocomplete feature on your smartphone; it can generate coherent text based on an initial input. But GPT-3's text-generating abilities go far beyond anything your phone is capable of. It can disambiguate pronouns, translate, infer, analogize, and even perform some forms of common-sense reasoning and arithmetic. It can generate fake news articles that humans can barely detect above chance. Given a definition, it can use a made-up word in a sentence. It can rewrite a paragraph in the style of a famous author. Yes, it can write creative fiction. Or generate code for a program based on a description of its function. It can even answer queries about general knowledge. The list goes on.

GPT-3 is a marvel of engineering due to its breathtaking scale. It contains 175 billion parameters (the weights in the connections between the "*neurons*" or units of the network) distributed over 96 layers. It produces embeddings in a vector space with 12,288 dimensions. And it was trained on hundreds of billions of words representing a significant subset of the Internet—including the entirety of English Wikipedia, countless books, and a dizzying number of web pages. Training the final model alone is estimated to have cost around \$5 million. By all accounts, GPT-3 is a behemoth. Scaling up the size of its network and training data, without fundamental improvements to the years-old architecture, was sufficient to bootstrap the model into unexpectedly remarkable performance on a range of complex tasks, out of the box. Indeed GPT-3 is capable of "*few-shot*," and even, in some cases, "*zero-shot*," learning, or learning to perform a new task without being given any example of what success looks like. Interacting with GPT-3 is a surreal experience. It often *feels* like one is talking to a human with beliefs and desires. In the 2013 movie *Her*, the protagonist develops a romantic relationship with a virtual assistant and is soon disillusioned when he realizes that he was projecting human feelings and

motivations onto “her” alien mind. GPT-3 is nowhere near as intelligent as the film’s AI, but it could still find its way into our hearts. Some tech startups like Replika are already working on creating AI companions molded on one’s desired characteristics. There is no doubt that many people would be prone to anthropomorphize even a simple chatbot built with GPT-3. One wonders what consequences this trend might have in a world where social-media interactions with actual humans have already been found to increase social isolation.

OpenAI is well aware of some of the risks this language model poses. Instead of releasing the model for everyone to use, it has only granted beta access to a select few—a mix of entrepreneurs, researchers, and public figures in the tech world. One might wonder whether this is the right strategy, especially given the company’s rather opaque criteria in granting access to the model. Perhaps letting everyone rigorously test it would better inform how to handle it. In any case, it is only a matter of time before similar language models are widely available; in fact, it is already possible to leverage open services based on GPT-3 (such as AI Dungeon) to get a sense of what it can do. The range of GPT-3’s capacities is genuinely impressive. It has led many commentators to debate whether it really “understands” natural language, reviving old philosophical questions.

Gone are the days of “good old-fashioned AI” like ELIZA, developed in the 1960s by Joseph Weizenbaum’s team at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. ELIZA offered an early glimpse of the future. Using carefully crafted “scripts,” ELIZA could exploit superficial features of language, by latching onto keywords, to produce predetermined answers in written conversations with humans. Despite its rudimentary, programmer-created ruleset, ELIZA was surprisingly effective at fooling some people into thinking that it could actually understand what they were saying—so much so that Weizenbaum felt compelled to write a book cautioning people to not anthropomorphize computer programs. Yet talking with ELIZA long enough could reveal that it was merely parroting human prose. ELIZA couldn’t parse natural language, let alone understand it, beyond simple and repetitive keyword-based tricks.

Computer science has made staggering progress since then, especially in recent years, and the subfield of natural language processing has been at the forefront. Rather than relying on a set of explicit hand-crafted instructions, modern algorithms use artificial networks loosely inspired by the mammalian brain. These learn how to perform tasks by training themselves on a large amount of data. The sole purpose of this process, known as machine learning, is to find the optimal value of a mathematical function roughly representing how good or bad each output of the model—each attempt to complete the task over some part of the data— is. While artificial neural networks performed poorly when they first came onto the stage in the 1950s, the availability of increasing amounts of computational power and training data eventually vindicated their superiority over traditional algorithms. Giving machines speech has, of course, long been considered a significant landmark on the winding path to developing human-level artificial intelligence. Much of the

intelligent-seeming things we do, like engaging in complex reasoning and abstract problem-solving, we do using natural language, such as English.

An old idea, the distributional hypothesis, guided the machine-learning revolution in the realm of natural language processing. Words that occur in a similar context, according to this idea, have a similar meaning. This means that, in principle, an algorithm might learn to represent the meaning of words simply from their distributions in a large amount of text. Researchers applied this insight to machine-learning algorithms designed to learn the meaning of words by predicting the probability of a missing word, given its context (the sentence or group of words in which it appears). In 2013, one such algorithm called “*word2vec*” was trained on a large corpus of news articles. During training, each word from the corpus was turned into a vector (also called an embedding) in a high-dimensional vector space. Words that occurred in similar contexts ended up having neighboring embeddings in that space. As a result, the distance between two-word embeddings (measured by the cosine of the angle between them) intuitively reflected the semantic similarity between the corresponding words. The more related the meanings of two words were, the closer their embeddings should be in the space. After training, *word2vec*’s embeddings appeared to capture interesting semantic relationships between words that could be revealed through simple arithmetic operations on the vectors. For example, the embedding for “king” *minus* the embedding for “man” *plus* the embedding for “woman” was closest to the embedding for ... “queen.” (Intuitively, “king” is to “man” as “queen” is to “woman.”)

GPT-3 is significantly more complex than *word2vec*. It is based on an artificial neural network architecture called “*Transformer*,” introduced in 2017. Neural networks based on this architecture can be “*pre-trained*” on an enormous amount of text to learn general properties of natural language. Then they can simply be “*fine-tuned*” on a smaller corpus to improve performance on a specific task—for example, classifying news articles by topic, summarizing paragraphs, or predicting the sentences that follow a given input. While GPT-3 does not revolutionize the *Transformer* architecture, it is so large, and was trained on so much data, that it can achieve performance near or above previous fine-tuned models, *without* any fine-tuning. Weizenbaum’s old worries about people anthropomorphizing ELIZA are all the more pressing when it comes to GPT-3’s vastly superior abilities. But does GPT-3 understand what it says? The answer largely depends on how much we build into the notion of understanding. GPT-3 seems to capture an impressive amount of latent knowledge about the world, knowledge that is implicitly encoded in statistical patterns in the distribution of words across its gargantuan training corpus. Nonetheless, there are good reasons to doubt that GPT-3 represents the meaning of the words it uses in a way that is functionally similar to humans’ word representations. At the very least, children learn language through a rather different process, mapping words to concepts that embed knowledge acquired not only through reading text, but also crucially through perceiving and exploring the world.

Consider how you learned what the word “*dog*” means. You presumably did not learn it merely by reading or hearing about dogs, let alone remembering the statistical distribution of the word “*dog*” in sentences you read or heard, but by seeing a real dog or a picture of one, and being told what it is. Your lexical concept *dog* does not merely encode the *similarity* between the meaning of the word “*dog*” and that of other words like “*cat*.” It embeds structured knowledge about dogs partially grounded in perceptual experience, including the knowledge that dogs have four legs, eat meat, and bark—all things you probably observed.

GPT-3’s word embeddings are not perceptually grounded in the world, which explains why it often struggles to consistently answer common-sense questions about visual and physical features of familiar objects. It also lacks the kind of intentions, goals, beliefs, and desires that drive language use in humans. Its utterances have no “*purpose*.” It does not “*think*” before speaking, insofar as this involves entertaining an idea and matching words to the components of a proposition that expresses it. Yet its intricate and hierarchically-structured internal representations allow it to compose sentences in a way that often feels natural, and display sophisticated modeling of the relationships between words over whole paragraphs. If the family of GPT language models had a motto, it could be “*Fake it till you make it*.” GPT-3 is certainly good at faking the semantic competence of humans, and it might not be an exaggeration to say that it has acquired its own form of semantic competence in the process.

In the first season of the TV show *Westworld*, the human protagonist visits a dystopian amusement park populated by hyper-realistic androids. Greeted by a human-like android host, he asks her, incredulous, whether she is real. She replies in a mysterious voice: “*If you can’t tell, does it matter?*” Whether or not GPT-3 understands and uses language like we do, the mere fact that it is often good enough to fool us has fascinating—and potentially troubling—implications. This is where Frankfurt’s notion of bullshit is helpful. According to Frankfurt, bullshit is speech intended to persuade without regard for truth. In that sense, there is an important difference between a liar and a bullshitter: The liar does care about the truth insofar as they want to hide it, whereas the bullshitter only cares about persuading their listener. Importantly, this does not entail that bullshitters never tell the truth; in fact, good bullshitters seamlessly weave accurate and inaccurate information together. For this very reason, as Frankfurt puts it, “*Bullshit is a greater enemy of truth than lies are.*”

At its core, GPT-3 is an artificial bullshit engine—and a surprisingly good one at that. Of course, the model has no intention to deceive or convince. But like a human bullshitter, it also has no intrinsic concern for truth or falsity. While part of GPT-3’s training data (Wikipedia in particular) contains mostly accurate information, and while it is possible to nudge the model toward factual accuracy with the right prompts, it is definitely no oracle. Without independent fact-checking, there is no guarantee that what GPT-3 says, even if it “*sounds right*,” is actually true. This is why GPT-3 shines when writing creative fiction, where factual accuracy is less of a

concern. But GPT-3's outputs are distinct enough from human concerns and motivations in language production, while being superficially close enough to human speech, that they can have potentially detrimental effects on a large scale.

First, the mass deployment of language models like GPT-3 has the potential to flood the Internet, including online interactions on social media, with noise. This goes beyond obvious worries about the malicious use of such models for propaganda. Imagine a world in which any comment on Twitter or Reddit, or any news article shared on Facebook, has a non-trivial probability of being entirely written by an algorithm that has no intrinsic concern for human values. That scenario is no longer science fiction. Just a few weeks ago, a self-help blog post written by GPT-3 reached the top of Hacker News, a popular news aggregation website. Hardly anyone suspected the hoax. We have to come to terms with the fact that recognizing sentences written by humans is no longer a trivial task. As a pernicious side-effect, online interactions between real humans might be degraded by the lingering threat of artificial bullshit. Instead of actually acknowledging other people's intentions, goals, sensibilities, and arguments in conversation, one might simply resort to a *reductio ad machinam*, accusing one's interlocutor of being a computer. As such, artificial bullshit has the potential to undermine free human speech online.

GPT-3 also raises concerns about the future of essay writing in the education system. For example, I was able to use an online service based on GPT-3 to produce an impressive philosophical essay about GPT-3 itself with minimal effort (involving some cherry-picking over several trials). As several of my colleagues commented, the result is good enough that it could pass for an essay written by a first-year undergraduate, and even get a pretty decent grade. *The Guardian* recently published an op-ed on artificial intelligence produced by stitching together paragraphs from several outputs generated by GPT-3. As they note, "*Editing GPT-3's op-ed was no different to editing a human op-ed*"—and overall, the result is coherent, relevant and well-written. Soon enough, language models might be to essays as calculators are to arithmetic: They could be used to cheat on homework assignments, unless those are designed in such a way that artificial bullshit is unhelpful. But it is not immediately obvious how one could guarantee that.

To conclude this article, I prompted GPT-3 to complete the first sentence of Frankfurt's essay. Here is one of the several outputs it came up with: "*Bullshitting is not always wrong, though sometimes it can be harmful. But even when it is harmless, it still has some serious consequences. One of those consequences is that it prevents people from being able to distinguish between what's real and what isn't.*" That's more bullshit, of course; but it fittingly rings true.

Finally -enough bullshit from me...- Tyler Tervooren, in his *Leadership for Introverts* in *Riskology* of March 27th, 2021 offers *A Brief Guide to Neutralizing Bullshit*. It is *priceless*!

Bullshit [bool-shit] *noun, verb: foolish, insolent talk.*

There's a lot of it in the world and that isn't necessarily a good or a bad thing; it just is. In any case, figuring out how to avoid it doesn't have to be complicated or stressful—it can usually be dealt with by asking yourself two important questions.

We'll get to that in a minute. First, a little history...

The Origins of Bullshit

In the beginning, the earth was sparsely populated. Men and women roamed free in their family-sized tribes, rarely coming in contact with others. Life was difficult then, but when survival and procreation were the loftiest goals, there wasn't time or space for shenanigans. Everyone in the family had a role to fulfill, and those duties would be performed from sunrise to sundown.

As we moved up the primordial food chain and secured our safety and security from the beasts, family size began to grow, and families started to organize themselves into tribes and clans. During this period, we showed our earliest signs of specialization—giving individuals a unique advantage of knowledge and skill over others—by relying on the tribe to provide for their other needs.

This period is widely regarded as the birth place of bullshit.

At first, bullshit was harmless—a game of wits played among friends during their brief leisure time. As one friend would try to trick another, the victim would ask, “*Are you bullshittin’ me?*” It was, of course, a rhetorical question. At this stage of human development, no one would attempt to pass off bullshit as truth because the repercussions were too severe. Excommunication from the tribe likely meant death for someone ill equipped to survive without the support of the family. But as we continued to succeed as a species, our population multiplied rapidly forcing once tight-knit tribes to split into separate factions to maintain order and familiarity. Today, we know this phenomenon as “*Dunbar’s Law,*” but at the time it was popularly referred to as the “*What’s your name, again?*” plague.

Neighboring clans began to exist closer and closer to each other and even begin to trade goods and services. Before long, clans themselves began to specialize and things like “*industries*” and “*economies*” were born as cities —ubiquitous masses of unfamiliar people—developed.

With the knowledge gap between specialties growing ever distant at the same time as access to unfamiliar people grew larger and larger, the ability to trick strangers with minor consequences grew. Many historians regard this period of time as the age when “*bullshit turned bad.*”

No longer were games of bullshit played only for fun between friends.

Bullshit in Modern Times

Today, bullshit is a ubiquitous part of society. The amount created and transmitted each day is so tremendous that it's no longer considered a special event to encounter it; it's more or less a part of every day life. The number of specialized tasks that we now rely on others to perform for us combined with an inflating population has bred a nearly infinite number of possibilities for malicious bullshitters to take advantage of us.

While harmless games of bullshit are still commonplace among friends, normally during large gatherings and over alcohol, malicious bullshit that preys on our lack of specific knowledge now permeates almost every part of our lives. This has been a wholly natural progression that's developed not from the will of shysters and cons to use on us, but instead by our own desire to receive it. In the modern world, we've developed a taste for unbelievable stories and hype. Sensation, no matter how true or false, draws our attention. And in a world of information overload, what doesn't get hyped, often doesn't get noticed.

To put it plainly, we like to be bullshitted. But we dislike the after-effect. We like to be bullshitted much in the way we enjoy alcohol, but not the hangover or the way we crave sex, but not the potential consequences.

And we're even very good at identifying bullshit, yet usually very bad at resisting it.

There's an evolutionary explanation for this. The most successful among us are typically people who took a chance on something that, at the time, seemed foolish. They possessed the foresight or, at the very least, the dumb luck to try something unpopular and benefitted greatly because of it. True risk-takers. This is something all of us want. We want to be the one who bucks the trend and shows the world what's possible with our brilliant/courageous/funny/[insert desirable adjective] actions. And this a good thing. This is how great discoveries happen. It's also why we're easily duped.

Take, for instance, my freshman year in college when two attractive girls came to my dorm room and invited me to a party just before offering me a great deal on my favorite magazine subscriptions—cash only. Party with two girls and all my favorite magazines for \$30? Sign me up! As you already know, there was no party and there were definitely no magazines. I had been on the receiving end of a massive pile of bullshit. The worse part is that I knew it the whole time. I agreed to the phony deal because I could afford it and it would've been a great story if it had been true.

You can't be a cynic all the time, and you shouldn't try to be either. If you write off everything as bullshit, you'll surely miss out on many no-bullshit opportunities. But

opening yourself up to bullshit, taking that leap, that risk, is like opening Pandora's box.

How do you protect yourself from bullshitters? The answer, I think, is not so difficult.

The Two Pillars of Bullshit Defense

Combating the malicious bullshit in your life needn't be all that complicated—it can be done in two steps—but before you can fix something, you have to identify the problem.

Since bullshit is so prolific in today's age, it can hit you from almost any angle, so being ready for anything is the best strategy, but that's impossible. Instead, a more realistic and decidedly less bullshit way to approach it is to attack the areas where bullshit is most likely to disrupt your life.

Here are a few examples that apply to most people. You may have more or less depending on how naturally bullshit resistant you are:

Marketing and advertising: The average person sees 4,000 – 10,000 advertisements per day, and money is a potent corrupter. Bullshit is rampant in financial transactions.

Relationships and dating: Depending on how and where you court your partners, bullshit can be highly concentrated in this facet of life, especially during the early stages.

News and politics: Due to our own appetite for sensation, the flow of bullshit runs very deep in this sector of society.

Higher education: For all the good it does in teaching us to think critically, the higher education system has a seething underbelly of bullshit created by very intelligent people more concerned with prestige than truth.

Work: Once you've been around awhile, the bullshit becomes mostly benign, but during the hiring and firing process, the amount of bullshit transacted by both employers and employees can be quite impressive.

Social Media: This is the new frontier of the Internet, and wherever there's unsettled territory, there's both great opportunity and immense bullshit.

With a good understanding of where bullshit tends to concentrate itself in your life, you can attack and defend against it with less effort. As the saying goes, "*Take care of the big problems, and the little ones will take care of themselves.*"

My own two-step solution to addressing bullshit when it rears its ugly head is simple:

I try to unveil it. I ask myself questions like, “*What’s the likelihood that this is total bullshit?*” or “*Is this an area of my life where bullshit tends to concentrate?*” Remember, we’re remarkably good at identifying bullshit, but remarkably terrible at defending ourselves from it.

Side note: Be very careful not to tune your bullshit sensor too sharply. This has the side effect of turning you into a full-time cynic, and that’s no way to go through life.

If I do identify bullshit, though, then my second step is to decide how severely to react to it.

Do I accept or ignore it? Bullshit is an integral part of life and, when experienced intentionally, can even be fun and exhilarating. If this is the benign strand of the bullshit virus and going along with it could be entertaining, why sweat it? If it’s not harming anyone else, why ruin a good time?

Do I attack it with truth? When malicious bullshit enters my life, I stand up to it and beat it down with as much truth and integrity as I can muster. If it’s malicious bullshit that won’t harm others, I may also choose to avoid it. Getting this part right is critical. Attacking bullshit with more bullshit does not cancel the equation; it multiplies it. When I let malicious bullshit in my life go unchecked, it severely limits my ability to enjoy friendly bullshit in the future.

Whichever decision you make, it’s good to remember that, as long as you want to participate in life, bullshit cannot be entirely avoided. The best decision for what to do in a bullshit-prone environment will depend on how important the outcome is for you and your ability to afford disappointment both financially and emotionally.

When it comes to bullshit, you can get ahead by playing the odds. Perhaps a few bullshit-spotting examples are in order.

Examples of Pure, Unfiltered Bullshit

Let’s say you see something on the news that leaves you feeling sad, angry, lonesome, or numb (this should not be unfamiliar to anyone). There’s a high likelihood that the report being made contains factual information but is presented via a stream of veritable bullshit. If you think that being an informed citizen is an important quality, then your best response is to seek out the same facts from another media source, or even several others. In this case, you’ll have to accept the fact that the bullshit will be amplified as you add more sources to the equation, but

in this multiplication is the opportunity to find the factual bits that multiply along with it. From there, you're free to reach your own conclusion.

If you've been on the Internet for more than 3 months, you have—at some point in time—run into a website with a giant red headline telling you there's an untapped secret to making \$10 million selling Furby dolls on eBay and all you have to do is pay \$97 for a special report that tells you how. That's a dead bullshit giveaway for almost anyone, but let's all admit we've seen some similar bullshit that made us at least look twice out of curiosity.

Now, I don't doubt for one second that there is, in fact, a way to make \$10 million selling Furby dolls, and I'd even give the author the benefit of the doubt that they did it. The real giveaway is in looking at the success stories of anyone else that's made \$10 million dollars and asking if their path to riches really was "easy" or if they bought their wealth from a \$97 ebook. There are plenty of great business resources worth paying for, but none I've ever come across promised something earth shattering for an unbelievable price. Instead, they promised a good value and an honest return policy. Kind of boring, actually, but no bullshit.

I like Twitter [*I hate it! GMH*]. A lot. I like it so much that I spend a lot of time hanging out and interacting with people on it. For me, it's a great place to chat with friends and get feedback on my articles. For others, it's a great place to vomit bullshit about how to get more followers to "*boost your business.*" These folks look convincing because they do in fact have lots and lots of twitter followers. If you look under the hood, though, it's easy to spot the house of cards. When you look to see who's following them, it's often a list of thousands and thousands of bots (i.e., not real people), and their Twitter stream is filled with garbage and links to \$10 million Furby cash engine sales pages. I don't know the last time I had a Twitter bot buy something from me. How about you?

In a case like this, I'm pretty annoyed, but I also understand that the bullshitter has, for the most part, no influence. They aren't talking to any real people. So, I ignore it and go about my day.

One Man's Bullshit...

I sincerely hope this brief guide has given you some tools to use for detecting and dealing with all of modern day's bullshit. That's the honest to God, no bullshit truth.

Please remember, though, that one man's gospel is another man's bullshit, and perhaps the most difficult hurdle in this whole game is coming to terms with the fact that bullshit is a subjective matter. What you believe in may sound like bullshit to another, and someone else's great idea may sound to you like bullshit to you.

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