Propaganda

PHIL 3050/5050

Fall 2026, Tuesdays, 5:00–7:50 p.m.

Dr. David Hildebrand, University of Colorado Denver
Hybrid: In Person & Zoom & Asynchronous
In-Person Location: Plaza M-108

Course Description

All who live in this world must choose what to do. Some of those choices can rely on first-hand experience, but most rely on information, facts, and descriptions from external sources. As every programmer will tell you, "Garbage in, garbage out." Thus, accurate and reliable information is critical for living freely, autonomously, and ethically. A typical philosophy class teaches logic and reasoning — which are important. But reasoning is useless if its content is deceptive, misleading, or incoherent. What's more, democratic self-governance that depends on reasoning is also undermined. This connection between accurate information, reasoning, and self-governance helps explain why propaganda may be the greatest danger a democracy has.

What is propaganda? How do we define it, locate it, and spell out what's wrong with it? This course investigates the epistemic, technological, and ethical dimensions of propaganda. We will define propaganda, understand how it works, and identify who might use propaganda toward their own ends. In part, this means looking at the technologies (text, video, social media, algorithms, AI, etc.) that can shape and create misinformation.

Course Objectives

Ideally, by the end of this course students should gain the following skills:

- **Familiarization.** Understand the historical background of propaganda and its many forms in daily life.
- **Comprehension.** Comprehend the arguments offered for defining, justifying, or criticizing various uses of propaganda.
- **Critical analysis.** Strengthen interpretation and critical analysis skills, especially considering how messages are shaped by context (media and audience). Criticize arguments by pointing out where they lack evidence, make an unreasonable leap, hold a false assumption, etc.

- **Empathy and imaginative projection.** Reflect on how diverse interpretations of messaging can promote understanding and respect for other perspectives.
- **Technological literacy.** Understand how changing technologies and information media reshape information, education, political institutions, and societal life.
- **Responsibility.** Increase sensitivity to the moral responsibilities of communicating in a digital age.
- **Demonstration.** Show the above through writing.
- **Verbalization.** Summarize and criticize positions regarding the above subject matters, without notes, using your own words.
- **Conversation and Debate.** Discuss issues in a focused and informed way with others in the class — listening closely to their points, then responding in a way that moves the discussion ahead.

Texts

Required Physical Text: *Propaganda and the Ethics of Persuasion — 2nd Edition*, by Randal Marlin, Broadview Press (2013); ISBN-10: 1554810914; ISBN-13: 978-1554810918.

Website to buy book: https://broadviewpress.com/product/propaganda-and-the-ethics-of-persuasion-second-edition/#tab-description

Discount code: HILDE2026 (apply at checkout on the product page above).

Required Online Texts: All other readings and resources will be posted on Canvas (ucdenver.instructure.com).

Canvas / Website

There are two online sites related to this course. Familiarize yourself with them right away. Both offer access to information about the course such as study questions, announcements, grades, and extra credit assignments.

- Canvas (ucdenver.instructure.com) — the primary course site. Enroll right at the beginning of the class.
- http://www.davidhildebrand.org — general study tips and philosophy resources.

Time Management and Expectations About Reading/Understanding Material

Time per week: Expect to spend approximately 5 hours per week on this course, outside of class. Short-term, non-emergency illnesses or other contingencies must be reported to me before class time by email or phone message; I will only consider an extension if I receive notification prior to the class or deadline, except in cases of documented emergency.

Readings: It is expected that you have done the readings before we discuss them. As you read, copy out important points and questions onto a separate sheet of paper — these will help with your short writings. You should come to class able to discuss the main issues of the reading, and you could be asked to present the main points to the class. Please set aside about 10 minutes shortly before class to skim-review the readings and whatever you have written for that day.

Course Requirements / Evaluation

Final grades are based on five components, weighted as percentages of the total course grade:

Component	Weight	Due Dates
Participation	15%	Throughout the semester
Short Writings (4 required)	20%	Presented in a classroom session and then uploaded to Canvas by 11:59 p.m. same day; 2 of 4 are due by Oct 13; the other 2 are due by Dec. 1.
Quizzes (best 5 of 6)	15%	During in-person sessions -- no quiz on 11/17 and 12/1
Midterm Thesis/ Prospectus	20%	Due Sun, Oct 11, 11:59 p.m.
Final Paper	30%	Due Thu, Dec 10, 11:59 p.m.

Grades

I use the plus/minus system. An "A" is at or above 93%; an "A−" will be 90–92.9%; a "B+" is 87–89.9%; a "B" is 83–86.9%; a "B−" is 80–82.9%; a "C+" is 77–79.9%; a "C" is 73–76.9%; a "C−" is 70–72.9%; a "D+" is 67–69.9%; a "D" is 63–66.9%; a "D−" is 60–62.9%; and an "F" is below 60%. Policies regarding grades are available in the CU Academic Policies and Regulations website: https://www.ucdenver.edu/registrar/student-resources/grades.

Graduate Student Grading Standards

Graduate students will have to do the following for course credit:

- (a) Graduate student final papers will be at least 30% longer than undergraduates' final papers.
- (b) Graduate student participation and any in-class presentations will be held to a higher standard of preparation and argumentative rigor.
- (c) Graduate student work, overall, will be assessed at a higher level than that of undergraduates.

Class Modes and Required Attendance

For all **in-person classes, attendance is required**. This course meets in one of three modes each week, indicated on the schedule below:

[Classroom] — For dates specified below, we will meet **in person** in Plaza M-108, 5:00–7:50 p.m. Attendance is **required**. These are the weeks with in-class quizzes.

[Zoom] — For other dates specified below, the class will gather synchronously on Zoom, 5:00–7:50 p.m. Attendance is **recommended but not required**.

[Async] — For the remaining dates listed as "async," the class will not meet as a group. Students work independently on the readings and post to Canvas as directed.

Attendance Policy — applies to **Classroom** sessions on campus. ONE unexcused absence over the course of the semester is permitted without penalty. An excusable absence is a medical illness or emergency that is completely unavoidable. It is the student's responsibility to talk to me about excusable absences as soon as possible, before or after the absence.

Additional absences' effect on final grade: Each *additional* unexcused absence beyond the one allowed will lower your final course grade by 3 percentage points. E.g., a student with a 90% (A−) at the end of the course who had 1 unexcused absences in addition to the one allowed would lose 3 percentage points (1 × 3) and wind up with an 87% (a B+).

Course Requirements — Details

(1) Participation — 15%

Course participation grades are not automatic. They are based on contributions to the collective learning experience of the class as a whole: asking pertinent questions, answering questions correctly or, at least, provocatively, making insightful observations, and offering other meaningful expressions of interest in the material that help encourage learning. Shyness is not an excuse — oral participation is part of your evaluation. There will be ample opportunity for active and well-prepared participation, which I value.

Participation grades will depend on the following:

- Informed dialogue in synchronous (Classroom and Zoom) sessions.
- Effective presentation of your short writings.
- Raising questions and comments in class — these need not be "deep" questions; they can be requests for clarification or explanation at any level.

(2) Short Writings — 20% (4 required, 5% each; at least 2 due by the Oct 13 class)

The purpose of these assignments is to help you clarify your understanding of the readings and think critically about the issues raised.

Which weeks: A short writing is due for materials assigned for Classroom meetings. There are more classroom meetings than short papers due, so you have some choice. You must do 2 by Oct. 13 class, and the other 2 by Dec. 1 class.

Due: Short writings are due in class the week you've chosen to write on, and must also be uploaded to Canvas by 11:59 p.m. that same day.

What and how much to write: 400–700 words.

- No summaries. Do not simply sum up the readings (no book reports). Answer critically and imaginatively.
- The first paragraph should state, in 1–2 sentences, what the paper is about.
- Only writings on that week's assigned readings are acceptable.
- A brief guide about short writings is here: https://www.davidhildebrand.org/uploads/3/2/1/2/32124749/hildebrand_how_to_write_a_short_critical_paper.pdf
- A brief video about short writings is here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ddacCvLG0A

Presenting Short Writings

If you've done a short writing for a particular class, you'll be asked about it in that class. Part of your participation grade is tied to your ability to present in class:

- (a) briefly explain the background of the paper (which readings or subject matter you're examining).
- (b) discuss your key observations and/or argument.

Grading on Short Writings

- A short paper may receive an S — Satisfactory (full credit, 5%); a U — Unsatisfactory (half credit, 2.5%); or a 0 — meaning nothing (or next to nothing) has been turned in or is turned in after the deadline.
- One make-up: if you receive a U, you may revise and resubmit. The revised grade replaces the original.

(3) Quizzes — 15% (6 quizzes, 2.5% each; lowest dropped, best 5 count)

At the start of each Classroom session except for 11/17 and 12/1 there will be a short, objective, paper-based quiz on that week's assigned, **required** readings. Quizzes are a comprehension check, not a deep-analysis exercise; the short writings and class discussion carry that weight instead. Your lowest quiz score is dropped, so your grade reflects your best 5 of 6.

(4) Midterm Thesis/Prospectus — 20%

Due: Sunday, October 11, 11:59 p.m. (before the Oct 13 class).

Format: ~1000 words minimum. Choose one of two **paths**:

- Single-thesis **path**: one working thesis for your final paper, developed in full.
- Multi-idea **path**: exactly 2 candidate theses, each developed more briefly, each still required to hit every component below.

This assignment is looking ahead to the final paper for the course. It asks you to provide a brief plan and outline if you already have a clear direction for your final paper, OR it allows you to sketch two live options if you're still deciding. Either path may draw on readings from any point in the course, including weeks not yet covered — some speculation is expected and welcome. (Speculation does not mean lack of rigor, though! See rubric below.)

Component	%	What it's checking
(a) Thesis(es) stated	20	A clear, specific claim (or 2 clear candidate claims) — not just a topic area, but an actual arguable position.
(b) Stakes / why it matters	20	For each thesis: a real explanation of why the question matters philosophically, not just "it's interesting."
(c) Readings in conversation	25	Specific readings named and accurately represented, put into conversation with each other (2–3 readings per thesis minimum, from anywhere in the course).
(d) Plausibility and coherence	20	The thesis is a real, arguable position — not trivially true, not incoherent.
(e) Mechanics and organization	15	Clear prose, meets word count, organized so a reader can follow the idea(s) without untangling it.

(5) Final Paper — 30%

What: Individual paper, building on your Midterm Thesis/Prospectus. At least 1500 words for undergraduates, 2500 words for graduate students. NOTE: If you have completely changed your mind from your midterm, that's ok, but let me know.

When: Due by 11:59 p.m. on December 10, 2026.

How: A more detailed assignment will be released. Possible topics may include (a) conspiracy theories, (b) the ethical stakes of propaganda, and (c) other topics arising from the course.

University Deadlines and Registrar Policies

University policies and academic calendars: https://www.ucdenver.edu/student/student-calendars/academic/fall

Course Policies

Plagiarism / Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism is a form of stealing. It occurs when an author uses the words or ideas of others as if they were the author's own original thought. (It may include using AI-generated text such as ChatGPT, word-for-word copying, interspersing one's own words with another's, paraphrasing, inventing or counterfeiting sources, submitting another's work as one's own, or neglecting quotation marks on material that is otherwise acknowledged.) Plagiarism is often unintentional. It can be avoided by always acknowledging one's debt to others by citing the exact source of a quotation or paraphrase. Since plagiarism is such a serious violation of academic honesty, the penalty for it will be an automatic F for this course.

AI and Assignments in this class: AI is forbidden for the creative parts of your assignments – generating ideas and brainstorming, outlining, or writing. The reason is that these are the aspects of the assignments that call on you to learn and grow – and tell me what *you* actually think. This will be hard to enforce, of course, so this is a rule which you must pledge to obey.

Academic dishonesty is the intentional disregard of course or university rules. This may include, but is not limited to, collaborating with others when rules forbid it, or using sources/experts not permitted by an assignment. The CU handbook has a more complete description of plagiarism and academic dishonesty.

Access, Disability, Communication

The University of Colorado Denver is committed to providing reasonable accommodation and access to programs and services to persons with disabilities. **Students with disabilities who want academic accommodations must register with Disability Resources and Services** (DRS), 177 Arts Building, phone (303) 315-3510, https://www.ucdenver.edu/offices/disability-resources-and-services. I will be happy to provide approved accommodations once you provide me with a copy of DRS's letter.

Students called for military duty: If you are a student in the military with the potential of being called to military service and/or training during the semester, you are encouraged to contact your school/college Associate Dean or Advising Office immediately.

Course Communication

In addition to announcements made and written handouts distributed in class, I may need to contact you between classes via individual and group email. One requirement for this course is that you **maintain a working email address, check it regularly, and let me know if it changes**. You are responsible for any messages I send you, including assignments and schedule changes. You may also contact me via email, office hours, or phone.

Civility and Technology

Technological distractions change the quality and quantity of our attention. They degrade our ability to listen and empathize with each other's feelings and ideas. **Silence and put away cell phones during class. Disable text messaging, web surfing, and other electronic distractions**. Evident distractions may result in expulsion from class and will be counted as an absence and against the participation grade. Students who are speaking deserve your attention and respect as much as I do — listen to one another. Adherence to the Student Conduct Code is expected.

Contact Information and Office Hours

Phone: 303-315-7223 (Department P.A.). **Canvas**: ucdenver.instructure.com

Email: david.hildebrand@ucdenver.edu **Website**: davidhildebrand.org

Office: Plaza M-108-H. Zoom: https://ucdenver.zoom.us/j/96038704642

Hours: Tuesdays 3-4 p.m. and by appointment (phone also an option).

I strongly encourage you to participate by arranging office hours — we can talk about the readings and lectures, papers, your progress, or philosophy in general. If you are a student with a disability, I will make myself available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations; documentation may be required before accommodations are made.

Note: All course requirements are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.

PHIL 3050/5050 — Semester at a Glance

Fall 2026 · Tuesdays, August 18 – December 1

C = Classroom **Z** = Zoom **A** = Async (no live meeting)

Date	Session	Mode
Aug 18	Course Introduction	C
Aug 25	Truth 1: What Do We Care About When We Care About Truth?	C
Sept 1	Truth 2: Is There an Ethical Duty to Be Truthful?	C
Sept 8	Belief, Authority, and Definitions of Propaganda	Z
Sept 15	A History of Propaganda	A
Sept 22	Language, Framing, and the Epistemology of Trust	C
Sept 29	Advertising, Autonomy, and Happiness	A
Oct 6	Advertising, Gender, and the Body	C
Oct 13	Ideology (Midterm Prospectus due Sun. Oct 11)	C
Oct 20	Conspiracy Theories I: When Is Distrust Rational?	Z
Oct 27	Conspiracy Theories II: Conspiracy Theories as Propaganda	A
Nov 3	Lying and Bullshit	A
Nov 10	Freedom of Expression: Autonomy, Nudging, and the Outrage Economy	C
Nov 17	Guest Lecture: Fascist propaganda as performance: Adorno (Prof. Metcalf)	C **or** Z
Nov 24	**No Class — Fall Break**	—
Dec 1	Institutions and the Algorithmic Present	C
Dec 10	Final paper due by 11:59 p.m. on Canvas	

PHIL 3050/5050 — Propaganda: Reading Schedule

All readings required unless listed as "recommended."

Tuesdays, August 18 – December 1, 2026

Meeting modes: **[Classroom]** **[Zoom]** **[Async (no live meeting)]**

Part 1: Truth and Knowledge

Aug 18 — Course Introduction [Classroom]

No assigned readings.

Aug 25 — What Do We Care About When We Care About Truth? [Classroom]

(a) Hendricks, Ch. 1–2
(b) Pryor, "What's So Bad about Living in the Matrix?"

What is truth? **Hendricks** lays out the classical justified-true-belief account of knowledge and the Gettier cases that complicate it. **Pryor** asks whether skepticism — living in a simulated world — would really threaten what we value about truth. His answer: mostly no, which sets up a question: does truth matter for its own sake, or for what it does for us?

Short Writing option this week (if chosen: due in class + Canvas by 11:59 p.m.).

Sept 1 — Is There an Ethical Duty to Be Truthful? [Classroom]

(a) 1877 Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief"
(b) 2017 Kolbert, "Why Facts Don't Change Our Minds" (New Yorker, 2017)
(c) Van Cleve/Reid, excerpt on veracity and credulity (via Van Cleve)

Recommended: 2008 Kolbert "What Was I Thinking?"

Ought I aim for truth? **Clifford's** ship-owner is at fault for believing without evidence, regardless of outcome. **Kolbert's** article complicates this, describing ways people are bad at revising beliefs in light of new facts. **Reid** argues trust in testimony is basic to human nature and asks what happens when that trust is exploited.

Short Writing option this week (if chosen: due in class + Canvas by 11:59 p.m.).

Part 2: How Propaganda Works

Sept 8 — Belief, Authority, and Definitions of Propaganda [Zoom]

(a) Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief"
(b) PEP ch. 1 Marlin
(c) 1979 Postman, "Propaganda" (ETC, 1979)

Peirce names four ways belief gets fixed — only one is acceptable, and it is self-correcting. **Marlin** explores these questions: Why Study Propaganda? What is at stake in studying propaganda? How have definitions changed over the years and what seems useful or viable now as a definition? **Postman** then turns to two real propaganda texts, showing in close detail how specific rhetorical devices do the work of bypassing rational scrutiny rather than engaging it.

Sept 15 — A History of Propaganda [Async]

(a) Marlin, Ch. 2

Marlin narrows a vast historical field to a manageable narrative: cases involving real deception or manipulation, and cases where power is genuinely at stake, from ancient rhetoric through the propaganda of the twentieth century's wars and revolutions. The chapter is as much about *how to study* propaganda historically as it is a survey of examples.

Sept 22 — Language, Framing, and the Epistemology of Trust [Classroom]

(a) Orwell, "Politics and the English Language"
(b) PEP Ch. 3, Marlin — "Credibility" and "Framing" sections only, through the Lippmann/Lakoff material

Optional: *the rest of Marlin Ch. 3*

Marlin maps propaganda's core appeals: ethos, pathos, and logos then explains that effective propaganda presents its goals as satisfying wants an audience already has. It also depends on staying undetected — once an audience spots propaganda as such, it tends to backfire. We'll examine credibility and framing: how trust gets earned or faked, and how a frame makes interpretation feel like plain description. **Orwell** shows the same move at the sentence level, arguing that vague, worn-out language isn't just careless but lets writers and politicians avoid thinking, and can make ugly realities sound neutral. His six rules for clearer writing are a partial remedy.

Short Writing option this week (if chosen: due in class + Canvas by 11:59 p.m.).

Part 3: Propaganda and Consumer Culture

Sept 29 — Advertising, Autonomy, and Happiness [Async]

(a) PEP Ch. 5, Marlin (advertising section)
(b) Lippke, "Advertising and the Social Conditions of Autonomy"
(c) Jhally, Advertising and the End of the World (film, required, before class)

Marlin's chapter notes that the line drawn between political and commercial persuasion is more habit than real difference. **Lippke** argues advertising undermines autonomy specifically: not just individual purchases, but the deeper capacity to form wants independently. **Jhally** pushes further, arguing that advertising trains us to reframe concepts we use to evaluate our lives — happiness, success, a good society — by recasting all as values we can achieve through consumption.

Oct 6 — Advertising, Gender, and the Body [Classroom]

(a) Papadaki, "Feminist Perspectives on Objectification" (SEP), §1, 4, 5; focus on the seven-features framework
(b) Nussbaum, "Objectification," pp. 249–265
(c) Kilbourne, Killing Us Softly 4 (film, required, before class — content note: eating disorders, body image)

Papadaki's encyclopedia entry surveys the objectification debate, starting from Kant's concern that treating someone as a mere means fails to respect their agency. **Nussbaum** identifies seven features that mark objectifying treatment — instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership, and denial of subjectivity — and argues they're logically related, with denial of autonomy

doing the most work. Papadaki also brings in Bartky's extension: objectification can be self-directed, as a person internalizes and applies an external gaze to their own body. **Kilbourne's** film supplies the empirical case — decades of advertising building an unattainable feminine ideal, with real consequences in disordered eating, damaged self-image, and violence against women.

Short Writing option this week (if chosen: due in class + Canvas by 11:59 p.m.).

Prospectus due Sun, Oct 11, 11:59 p.m.

Part 4: Propaganda and Political Belief

Oct 13 — Ideology [Classroom]

(a) Stanley, "Precis of How Propaganda Works"
(b) Stanley, How Propaganda Works, Ch. 6, through p. 256

Optional: *rest of Ch. 6 · Stanley Ch. 5 · Pottle, "'The Greatest Flood of Mass Suggestion'"*

Stanley's *Precis* lays out the core move: propaganda spreads not just false beliefs, but a "flawed ideology" that resists correction because it's bound up with identity and interest. *Ch. 6* develops this: material inequality generates a flawed ideology of meritocracy, protecting elites' self-image while getting internalized by the underprivileged too. Stanley draws on Weber, Steele's self-affirmation theory, and Milgram's obedience experiments to explain the psychology, then uses the Iraq War and Chomsky and Herman's propaganda model as a case study. He closes by arguing that justified belief is partly relative to social position."

Short Writing option this week (if chosen: due in class + Canvas by 11:59 p.m.). Midterm Thesis/

Oct 20 — Conspiracy Theories I: When Is Distrust Rational? [Zoom]

(a) Coady, "An Introduction to the Philosophical Debate about Conspiracy Theories"
(b) Keeley, "Of Conspiracy Theories"

We've been asking how people come to trust official claims so uncritically. Conspiracy theories flip the question: when is *distrust* rational, and when does it become its own kind of unwarranted belief? **Coady** surveys the field — definitions, Popper's "cock-up theory," and "quasi-conspiracies," where people coordinate without direct communication. **Keeley** supplies a sustained argument using the Oklahoma City bombing to distinguish "unwarranted conspiracy theories" from real ones like Watergate. His diagnosis turns on errant data (counterevidence gets read as cover-up) and the escalating institutional distrust that such a theory requires.

Oct 27 — Conspiracy Theories II: Conspiracy Theories as Propaganda [Async]

(a) Cassam, "The Intellectual Character of Conspiracy Theorists" (Aeon, 2015) — read first
(b) Cassam, "Conspiracy Theories" (Society, 2023)

Cassam's *Aeon* piece introduces virtue/vice epistemology through a single case: rather than asking whether a conspiracy theorist has good reasons, Cassam asks what kind of thinker he is. He is gullible, closed-minded, and careless and these are durable, often self-concealing character traits. The *Society* piece surveys and critiques recent approaches and argues both miss the point. Cassam's alternative: conspiracy theories are best understood politically, as a form of propaganda that expresses and promotes ideology — often, historically, antisemitic ideology, from the Protocols to QAnon. He directly challenges Coady's

case-by-case evidential approach, arguing it concedes too much legitimacy to theories that were never serious candidates for truth.

Part 5: Ethics, Speech, and the Algorithmic Present

Nov 3 — Lying and Bullshit [Async]

(a) PEP Ch. 4, Marlin, through the Bok/Nyberg discussion
(b) Frankfurt, "On Bullshit"

Optional: *rest of Ch. 4 (Dirty Hands, Habermas, Whately, Walton, Ward)*

Marlin grounds ethics-of-propaganda by arguing that even moral skeptics *act* as if some ways of treating others are better than others, and society needs working rules regardless of theoretical disagreement about ethics' foundations. He surveys major ethical frameworks, and anchors the chapter in lying specifically (since propaganda has often been defined in terms of manipulation and deception). Marlin works through the historical debates (Augustine, Kant, Grotius, Bok, Nyberg). **Frankfurt** focuses the discussion with a distinction Marlin gestures toward: bullshit isn't a milder form of lying, it's a different relationship to truth altogether. The liar has to track the truth carefully in order to successfully avoid it; the bullshitter has simply stopped caring whether what he says is true. This makes both an epistemic and ethical difference.

Nov 10 — Freedom of Expression: Autonomy, Nudging, and the Outrage Economy [Classroom]

(a) PEP Ch. 6, Marlin — Introduction, Mill's harm principle, the Infallibility/Legitimacy argument, "Modern Communications Media"
(b) Thaler & Sunstein, "Libertarian Paternalism"
(c) Lynch, "The Outrage Factory"

Optional: *rest of Ch. 6*

Marlin argues that law and opinion shape each other, and nearly every free-speech restriction comes with a plausible justification, however abused in practice. Within that frame, **Mill's** harm principle holds that restraining someone for their own good is never justified, and his infallibility argument holds that suppressing a view presumes a certainty no one has. **Thaler and Sunstein** complicate the paternalism side: neutral choice presentation is a myth, since institutions must pick some default and defaults are sticky. **Lynch** pushes further, arguing platforms built to reward outrage over truth undermine the autonomous, truth-seeking agent Mill's framework assumes.

Short Writing option this week (if chosen: due in class + Canvas by 11:59 p.m.).

Nov 17 — Guest Lecture: Fascist propaganda as performance (Prof. Rob Metcalf) [Classroom or Zoom]

(a) Adorno, "Anti-Semitism and Fascist Propaganda" (1946), pp. 218–231

Prof. **Metcalf** will frame fascist propaganda through Russell and Arendt — violence over persuasion, propaganda over argument, de-factualization. **Adorno** supplies the psychological mechanics: fascist propaganda as ritual and performance rather than argument.

Short Writing option this week (if chosen: due in class + Canvas by 11:59 p.m.).

Nov 24 — No Class (Fall Break) [No Class]

Dec 1 — Propaganda, Institutions, and the Algorithmic Present [Classroom]

(a) Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death, Ch. 7, "Now...This"
(b) Hobbs, "Postman's Legacy in a 'Post-Truth' Landscape of Algorithmic Propaganda," from "Propaganda Education in a World Made of Symbols" to the end
(c) Stanford HAI, "The Disinformation Machine"

Optional: *Hobbs, remaining sections · Rosen, "The View from Nowhere" · Chomsky, "The Propaganda Model" · film: Manufacturing Consent*

Postman argues television's "Now...This" structure — jumping between unrelated stories with no logical connection — is itself a kind of disinformation, apart from whether any individual claim is false. Why? Because it destroys the context needed to notice contradiction and trains audiences to expect entertainment over argument. **Hobbs** traces this back to Korzybski, whose central idea was that language doesn't just describe reality, it selects and organizes it. She then extends the argument into the algorithmic present, showing how platforms' engagement-driven ranking automates Postman's logic at far greater speed and precision. **Stanford HAI** makes this concrete: AI-generated propaganda tested nearly as persuasive as real state-sponsored propaganda, and light human editing closed the remaining gap. Is AI propaganda a genuinely new philosophical problem, or an old one operating at a new scale?

Short Writing option this week (if chosen: due in class + Canvas by 11:59 p.m.).

Dec. 10 Final due by 11: 59 p.m.