

TRUTH DECAY, FALL 2023

Tuesday 10:00-11:30, Virtual

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The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the dedicated communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction, true and false, no longer exists.
(Hannah Arendt)

Course Description

“Truth” continues to decay. We will check in on recent developments and review the basic theories of free speech, a free press, objective science and objective journalism, public relations, and propaganda. Each topic begins with a review of these concepts before the Internet and social media, the analog world. We will focus more heavily, however, on how these technologies of the digital world have upset assumptions about the paths to truth.

Weeks One and Two (September 19 and 26) *The marketplace of ideas*

The analog world

The founding fathers and The Enlightenment faith in reason

John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*

The Lippmann v Dewey debate democracy and human rationality

Conspiratorial minds

The digital world

The Internet and social media. Dewey's dream or Lippmann's nightmare

Weeks Three and Four (October 3 and 17) *Objective journalism*

The analog world

Journalism as authority

A Free and Responsible Press

Anti-intellectualism

Post modernism

The digital world

Economic impact of Internet on traditional journalism

Return of the “partisan” press

Weeks Five and Six (October 24 and 31) *Disinformation and Misinformation*

The analog world

Public relations and propaganda

The digital world

Same goals. Better tools.

Week Seven and Eight (November 7 and 14) *Preventing truth decay.*

Self-regulation of content

Government regulation of content

Media literacy

Blow up the economics.