

# Frankfurt Wasn't Bullshitting!

**Don Fallis**

University of Arizona

Winner of the Hubert Alexander Memorial Award

## I. INTRODUCTION

In order to learn about the world, we gather information. Sometimes, we make direct observations using our own senses. But, more often, we get information from other people (face-to-face, via books, via the internet, etc.).

Unfortunately, not all of this testimony is to be trusted. Sometimes the speaker is accidentally mistaken. Sometimes the speaker intends to deceive us. And, sometimes the speaker is just not concerned with whether or not what she says is true. This last variety of dangerous testimony is sometimes referred to as “claptrap,” as “talking through one’s hat,” or more commonly, as “bullshit.”

In order to avoid being misled by such dangerous testimony, it is helpful to understand its different varieties. (After all, the clues that suggest that someone is lying to us are likely to be different from the clues that suggest that she just does not know what she is talking about.) Toward this end, many philosophers (e.g., Augustine 1952, 54-60, Fallis 2009, Carson 2010, 15-45, Stokke 2013) have put forward analyses of *lying*. In his bestselling book, Harry Frankfurt (2005) offers a characterization of what *bullshit* is.

Several philosophers have subsequently criticized Frankfurt’s characterization on the grounds that it rules out many cases of bullshit. In this paper, I defend his characterization of bullshit by spelling out more precisely what I think that he has in mind. In section II, I review what Frankfurt says about what bullshit is. In section III, I offer an analysis of bullshit in the spirit of Frankfurt’s characterization. In section IV, I show that the proposed counter-examples to his characterization are captured by this analysis (or that they are not the sort of utterance that Frankfurt intended to capture in the first place). In section V, however, I use this analysis to show that Frankfurt ignores an important and common category of bullshit.

## II. FRANKFURT ON BULLSHIT

Harry Frankfurt (2005, 33-34) says that it is a “lack of connection to a concern with truth—this indifference to how things really are—that I regard as the essence of bullshit.” According to Frankfurt (2005, 30-31), someone bullshits when she asserts something “without any regard for how things really are ... without conscientious attention to the relevant facts ... without bothering to take into account at all the question of its accuracy.”

Frankfurt further characterizes bullshit by contrasting it with another variety of dangerous testimony, the *lie*. There is certainly a sense in which someone who lies does not care about the truth. After all, she is willing to say things that directly conflict with it. But, this is not what Frankfurt has in mind when he says that someone who bullshits does not care about the truth. As Frankfurt (2005, 59-61) points out, “both in lying and in telling the truth people are guided by their beliefs concerning the way things are.” Thus, someone who lies does care about the truth insofar as she wants to avoid it. By contrast, someone who bullshits “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.”

Frankfurt also characterizes bullshit by providing several examples. Most notably, Frankfurt (2005, 16-18) asks us to

Consider a Fourth of July orator, who goes on bombastically about “our great and blessed country, whose Founding Fathers under divine guidance created a new beginning for mankind.” ... He would be lying only if it were his intention to bring about in his audience beliefs that he himself regards as false, concerning such matters as whether our country is great, whether it is blessed, whether the Founders had divine guidance, and whether what they did was in fact to create a new beginning for mankind. But the orator does not really care what the audience thinks about the Founding Fathers, or about the role of the deity in our country’s history, or the like. ... The orator intends his statements to convey a certain impression of himself. ... He wants them to think of him as a patriot, as someone who has deep thoughts and feelings about the origins and the mission of our country, who appreciates the importance of religion, who is sensitive to the greatness of our history, whose pride in that history is combined with humility before God, and so on.

## III. LACKING A CONCERN WITH TRUTH

My suggestion is that Frankfurt should say that an assertion is bullshit if the speaker lacks a concern for *the inquiry getting to* the truth.<sup>1</sup> More precisely, an assertion is bullshit if and only if the speaker does not care whether the inquiry gets closer to the truth, gets further from the truth, or stays in the same place. In this section, I spell out exactly what this means.

When an assertion is made, it is typically offered as a contribution to an inquiry. For instance, if I am planning a trip to Chicago tomorrow, I might ask my friends, “What is the weather like in Chicago?” In this case, if Tom replies, “This time of year,

it is always warm in Chicago,” he is offering a contribution to my inquiry about what the weather is like in Chicago.

Sometimes, as when I am planning my trip to Chicago, it is explicit what the goal of the inquiry is. Sometimes, as in the case of the Fourth of July orator, it is less clear. But, an inquiry always has the goal of answering some question (or questions), even if it is only the question of whether or not what is asserted is true. Also, it should be noted that the goal of an inquiry can change over time. For instance, one of the participants may simply change the subject of a conversation. Jerry might say, “I don’t care about you and your trip to Chicago. Let’s talk about what happened to Malaysian Airlines flight 370.”

The current status of an inquiry with respect to its goal can be represented with the set of possible worlds that, as far as the inquirer knows, could be the actual world (cf. Stalnaker 1999, 84-88). For instance, suppose that I would like know whether it is warm or cold in Chicago, whether it is dry or rainy, and whether it is calm or windy. In that case, there are eight possible worlds (warm-dry-calm, warm-dry-windy, etc.) to start with.<sup>2</sup> The goal of my inquiry is to narrow things down to the one world that is actual.

There are three different effects that an assertion might have on an inquiry. First, it might narrow down the set of possible worlds that could be the actual world. For instance, Tom’s remark (if I believe it) allows me to eliminate the four possible worlds in which it is cold in Chicago. Second, an assertion might open up the set of possible worlds. For instance, if Dick responds to Tom’s remark by saying, “Even this time of year, it could be cold in Chicago if it is really windy,” I will have to add back the two possible worlds in which it is cold and windy. Finally, an assertion might leave the set of possible worlds unchanged. For instance, if Harry goes on to say, “I love Chicago. You should definitely visit Navy Pier,” it will not tell me anything about the weather in Chicago.

Whether or not these different effects get an inquiry closer to the truth depends on what the actual world is like. First, narrowing down the set of possible worlds gets an inquiry closer to the truth if worlds that are not actual are eliminated. For instance, Tom’s remark gets my inquiry closer to the truth if it is actually warm in Chicago (and it takes my inquiry further from the truth if it is actually cold). Second, opening up the set of possible worlds gets an inquiry closer to the truth if the actual world is added back. For instance, Dick’s remark gets my inquiry closer to the truth if it is actually cold and windy in Chicago (and it takes my inquiry further from the truth if it is actually warm). Finally, leaving the set of possible worlds unchanged (as Harry’s remark does) leaves the inquiry unchanged.<sup>3</sup>

This account of inquiry is inspired by Robert Stalnaker’s (1999) notion of a *common ground*.<sup>4</sup> However, there are two significant differences that should be noted. First, I take the status of an inquiry to be a more restrictive concept than the common ground of a conversation. It is possible to put all sorts of true information on the conversational table without addressing at all the question that we are clearly trying to answer. For instance, it might very well be true that Harry loves Chicago, but that does not tell me anything about the weather in Chicago. Thus, it is possible to narrow the common ground toward the truth without taking the inquiry any closer to

the truth. Second, Stalnaker (1999, 84) defines the common ground in terms of what the inquirer(s) are willing to “*assume* for the purpose of the conversation” (emphasis added). But, I characterize the status of an inquiry in terms of what the inquirer(s) actually *believe* about which worlds are possible.

This account of inquiry can be used to give analyses of bullshitting and of bullshit. Someone is *bullshitting* if and only if she does not care whether or not her assertion gets the inquiry closer to the truth.<sup>5,6</sup> Unlike someone who is lying, she does not intend to take the inquiry further from the truth, but she certainly puts the inquiry at risk of this happening.<sup>7</sup> *Bullshit* (at least of the sort that Frankfurt is interested in) is the assertion produced by someone who is bullshitting.

My analysis here is clearly in the spirit of Frankfurt’s characterization of bullshit. Moreover, it captures the prototypical cases of bullshit that Frankfurt discusses. For instance, although the Fourth of July orator is discussing the Founding Fathers and “the role of the deity in our country’s history,” he does not care whether or not his statements will lead his audience to the truth on these topics. The orator does have a goal that he is trying to achieve in making these statements. As Frankfurt (2005, 14) points out about bullshit in general, “its primary intention is ... to give its audience a false impression concerning what is going on in the mind of the speaker.”<sup>8</sup> But, getting an inquiry about the Founding Fathers closer to the truth is not a means to this goal of the orator.

#### IV. BULLSHITTERS WHO CARE

In prototypical cases of bullshitting, speakers do not care about getting to the truth of the matter at all. However, several philosophers have claimed that, contra Frankfurt, speakers can be bullshitting despite the fact that they do care about the truth of what they say. My analysis can be used to defend Frankfurt’s characterization of bullshit against such proposed counter-examples.<sup>9</sup>

Scott Kimbrough (2006, 12-13) asks us to “consider the case of an avid fan of conservative talk radio” who claims “that the French are an irrational and ungrateful people, and that liberals have an anti-Christmas agenda.” Moreover, “if anyone were to challenge his commitment to truth, he would (as his mentors have trained him to do) take offense and write off the challenger as a dupe of the liberal media.” This talk radio fan seems to be producing bullshit even though he cares about what he says being true.

While this talk radio fan does care about the truth of what he says, nevertheless, he lacks a concern for *the inquiry getting to the truth*. This lack of concern is exhibited by the fact that he has ignored relevant evidence (or at least has failed to seek sufficient evidence) on these topics.<sup>10</sup> He only cares about the truth in the sense that he wants the truth to be where he has gotten to with his inquiry. (It may not be important to him for its own sake that it to be true that the French are irrational, but it *is* very important to him that his side be right about the French being irrational.) Basically, his concern with the truth does not have the right *direction of fit* (see Humberstone 1992). That is, he wants the world to match his assertions rather than wanting his assertions to match the world. Thus, my analysis does give the correct result that this talk radio fan is

bullshitting.<sup>11,12</sup>

Even so, some philosophers might claim that someone can be bullshitting despite the fact that she cares about the truth of what she says *and* she pays (a lot of) attention to relevant evidence. For instance, Thomas Carson (2010, 62) writes that

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

Nevertheless, this is not a counter-example to my analysis either. Since she wants what she literally says to be true, the student does care about her assertion taking the common ground closer to the truth. But since she is not concerned with providing an accurate answer to the *exam question*, the student does not care about her assertion taking the *inquiry* closer to the truth.<sup>13</sup> So, she is bullshitting on my analysis.

Finally, some philosophers might even claim that someone can be bullshitting despite the fact that she does care *about the inquiry* getting to the truth. For instance, Michael Wreen (2013, 110) gives the following example:

Imagine that after years of study I come up with a complicated system for beating the casinos that I sincerely believe is flawless. I travel across the United States lecturing about it to various groups, enthusiastically touting its virtues. In fact, I couldn't be more wrong: the system is seriously defective and contains multiple errors, silly even egregious errors, errors on a par with those committed by Hobbes in "squaring the circle."

In this case, the speaker seems to be producing bullshit. However, because he has endeavored to pay attention to relevant evidence with all of those years of study, the guy with the gambling system does care about the inquiry getting to the truth. (In other words, his concern with the truth has the right direction of fit. He is just unfortunately mistaken about what the truth is.) Thus, my analysis does not count him as bullshitting.

Instead of having to bite the bullet about this case, however, I can allow that there may be a *sense* in which the guy with the gambling system is producing bullshit. Namely, we might say that, regardless of the state of mind of the speaker, any assertion that has the effect (if it is believed) of taking the inquiry further from the truth is bullshit (cf. Cohen 2002, 332).<sup>14</sup> However, Frankfurt (2002, 340) is trying to understand the *activity* of bullshitting, which like the activity of lying, turns on the speaker having (or lacking) certain intentions. Although there may be a sense in which he is producing bullshit, the guy with the gambling system is not *bullshitting*.<sup>15</sup> Thus, he is not producing bullshit of the sort that Frankfurt is explicitly interested in.

## V. A FORGOTTEN SPECIES OF BULLSHIT

My analysis captures the prototypical cases of bullshit that Frankfurt discusses. It also handles the proposed counter-examples where someone seems to be bullshitting despite caring about the truth. But, as I discuss in this section, it also captures some interesting cases of bullshit that Frankfurt does not discuss.

When someone does not care whether or not an inquiry gets to the truth, she might (like the Fourth of July orator) not care *at all* about what happens to the inquiry. However, she might instead want the inquiry to go a certain way, but just not care whether or not that way happens to be toward the truth. For instance, in response to my query, Thelma might reply, “This time of year, it is always rainy in Chicago,” not because she knows (or even believes) that this is true, but just because she has an umbrella that she would like to sell me. Unlike the orator, in order for Thelma to achieve her goal, she needs my inquiry to go a certain way. Namely, she needs me to eliminate the possible worlds in which it is dry in Chicago. Even so, it is not important to Thelma whether or not this change takes my inquiry closer to, or further from, the truth. (Either way, she will be able to sell me an umbrella.) Thus, her reply seems to be bullshit.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, Frankfurt seems to be committed to Thelma’s remark being bullshit. For instance, she is not trying to oppose herself to the truth. Thelma cannot do that since she does not even know what the truth about the weather is. In addition, it does not look like she is guided by her beliefs concerning the way things are. After all, Thelma has no beliefs about what the weather is like in Chicago.

Unfortunately though, bullshit of this sort creates a bit of a problem for Frankfurt. As noted above, Frankfurt wants to contrast bullshitting with lying. However, Thelma is arguably lying as well as bullshitting. According to some philosophers (e.g., Carson 2010, 30), you just have to assert something that you do not believe to be true in order to be lying. In response, Frankfurt might insist, as many philosophers do (e.g., Fallis 2009, 34, Stokke 2013), that you have to know (or at least believe) that what you say is false in order to be lying. In that case, Thelma is not lying. Nevertheless, Frankfurt would still have a problem.

Consider Louise who also replies to my query with, “This time of year, it is always rainy in Chicago,” just because she has an umbrella that she would like to sell me. However, let us suppose that she happens to *know* that what she is saying is false and, thus, that she is lying. Just like Thelma, Louise needs my inquiry to go a certain way. But also just like Thelma, it is not important to Louise whether this change takes my inquiry closer to, or further from, the truth. She happens to know that her assertion (if it is believed) will take my inquiry further from the truth. But, taking my inquiry further from the truth is not a means to her goal. It would not bother her at all if it turned out that she was wrong about the weather and her assertion actually took my inquiry closer to the truth. She would still be able to sell me an umbrella, which is her ultimate goal in making her assertion. (Basically, while she needs me to acquire a belief about the weather that happens to be false, she does not need me to acquire that belief because it is false.) So, while Louise is clearly lying, she is also bullshitting on my analysis.<sup>17</sup>

Now, there are some instances of lying where the speaker does care that her asser-

tion takes the inquiry further from the truth. Augustine (1952, 86-88) classified several types of lie: “the fourth is the lie which is told solely for the pleasure of lying and deceiving, that is, the real lie” (see also Frankfurt 2005, 57-59). Someone who tells such a lie wants you to believe something false *because* it is false. Also, someone who tells you a lie so that she can discredit you when you repeat it (see Ludlow 2013) wants you to believe something false because it is false. But, most people who lie seem to be like Louise. There is something that they want us to believe, and they would want us to believe it even if it were true (cf. Holt 2005, 70). Thus, my analysis counts most lies as bullshit.

Moreover, this is a bullet that Frankfurt is probably just going to have to bite. The criteria that he uses to distinguish lying from bullshitting will not allow him to hold that the knowledgeable umbrella seller (Louise) is not bullshitting while the ignorant umbrella seller (Thelma) is. For instance, neither Thelma nor Louise is trying to oppose herself to the truth. At most, Louise is trying to oppose herself to something that happens to be true. But, Thelma is doing exactly the same thing.<sup>18</sup> (Only someone who wants you to believe something false *because* it is false is really trying to oppose herself to the truth.)

Admittedly, there is a sense in which Louise is guided by the facts. In order to get me to buy an umbrella, she needs to convince me that what she is saying about the weather in Chicago is true. In order to do this, she needs to pay attention to what she knows about the world (and, most importantly, to what she knows about what I know about the world). But since Thelma also needs to convince me that what she is saying is true, she is also guided by the facts in the very same way. (Of course, since Thelma lacks at least one piece of knowledge that Louise has, she might be slightly less convincing.) In particular, she will try to avoid saying things that she knows that I believe to be false. For instance, suppose that I reply to her remark by saying, “It doesn't *always* rain this time of year. I was just watching the Cubs game on TV yesterday and it was a fine day.” In that case, she might say, “That was just an anomaly. A huge thunderstorm is coming in tomorrow” (again without knowing whether or not a storm is really coming in).

In fact, the Fourth of July orator is also guided by facts to some degree. He does not need to convince his audience that what he is saying is true. But he does want to convey a certain impression of himself. In order to do this, he needs to pay some attention to facts about American history and to what his audience is likely to know about it.<sup>19</sup> For instance, listing Ronald Reagan as one of the Founding Fathers is not going to serve his cause very well. (Many people in the audience will think, “How patriotic could this guy really be if he does not even know that Reagan was definitely not a Founding Father?”)

But, in the end, maybe counting a lot of lies as bullshit is not such a big problem. This outcome is pretty much unavoidable for Frankfurt. Even a speaker who does not care about the inquiry at all can be lying. For instance, suppose that the Fourth of July orator, despite knowing that it never happened, mentions in his speech that Washington chopped down a cherry tree as a boy. Other philosophers (e.g., Carson 2010, 61-62, Wreen 2013, 109) have also given examples of lies that they claim to be bullshit. Indeed, even though he contrasts bullshitting with lying in his book, Frankfurt (2002,

341) himself subsequently admitted that there can be *bullshit lies*.<sup>20</sup>

## REFERENCES

- Augustine. 1952 [395]. "Lying." Pp. 53-120 in *Treatises on Various Subjects*, ed. R. J. Deferrari. New York: Catholic University of America.
- Carson, Thomas L. 2010. *Lying and Deception*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, G. A. 2002. "Deeper into Bullshit." Pp. 321-39 in *Contours of Agency*, eds. Sarah Buss and Lee Overton. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- De Waal, Cornelis. 2006. "The Importance of Being Earnest: A Pragmatic Approach to Bullshitting." Pp. 99-113 in *Bullshit and Philosophy*, eds. Gary L. Hardcastle and George A. Reisch. Chicago: Open Court.
- Dynel, Marta. 2011. "A Web of Deceit: A Neo-Gricean View on Types of Verbal Deception." *International Review of Pragmatics* 3:139-67.
- Fallis, Don. 2009. "What is Lying?" *Journal of Philosophy* 106:29-56.
- Frankfurt, Harry. 2002. "Reply to G. A. Cohen." Pp. 340-44 in *Contours of Agency*, eds. Sarah Buss and Lee Overton. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Frankfurt, Harry G. 2005 [1986]. *On Bullshit*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Grice, Paul. 1989. *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Holt, Jim. 2005. "Say Anything." *New Yorker* 81(24):69-75.
- Humberstone, I. L. 1992. "Direction of Fit." *Mind* 101:59-83.
- Kimbrough, Scott. 2006. "On Letting It Slide." Pp. 3-18 in *Bullshit and Philosophy*, eds. Gary L. Hardcastle and George A. Reisch. Chicago: Open Court.
- Ludlow, Peter. 2013. "The Real War on Reality." *New York Times*. <http://opinionator.blogs.ny-times.com/2013/06/14/the-real-war-on-reality>
- Malady, Matthew J. X. 2013. "We Are Teaching High School Students to Write Terribly." *Slate*. [http://www.slate.com/articles/life/education/2013/10/sat\\_essay\\_section\\_problems\\_with\\_grading\\_instruction\\_and\\_prompts.single.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/life/education/2013/10/sat_essay_section_problems_with_grading_instruction_and_prompts.single.html)
- Stalnaker, Robert C. 1999. *Context and Content*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stokke, Andreas. 2013. "Lying and Asserting." *Journal of Philosophy* 110:33-60.
- Wreen, Michael. 2013. "A P.S. on B.S.: Some Remarks on Humbug and Bullshit." *Metaphilosophy* 44:105-15.

## NOTES

1. In a similar vein, Cornelis De Waal (2006, 99) contrasts bullshitting with "genuine inquiry."
2. For many inquiries, the set of possible worlds will be much more fine-grained than this.
3. We might want to say that, because it wastes the time of the inquirer, leaving the set of possible worlds unchanged does subvert the inquiry even though it does not take the inquiry further from the truth.
4. Andreas Stokke (2013) made use of Stalnaker's notion of a common ground in his analysis of lying. But, I think that this sort of notion can also help us understand other varieties of dangerous testimony including bullshit.
5. A single assertion can actually be a contribution to more than one inquiry. For instance, we might want to determine whose fingerprints are on the gun on the way to determining who committed the murder. A speaker might be bullshitting with respect to one inquiry, but not with respect to another.

6. Frankfurt (2005, 54) claims that, while someone who bullshits need not intend to deceive about what she says, she must intend to deceive about what she is up to. However, Carson (2010, 60-61) shows that people who bullshit can sometimes achieve their goals without hiding the fact that they are bullshitting. Thus, it seems that there can be *bald-faced* bullshit just as there can be bald-faced lies.

7. Strictly speaking, it is sufficient for lying that a speaker intend to take the *common ground* further from the truth (cf. Stokke 2013). It is also worth noting that a speaker can be bullshitting even if she cares about whether or not her assertion takes the common ground further from the truth (see section 4 below).

8. The impression that someone who bullshits often wants to give is just that she knows what she is talking about. For instance, a student who gives a bullshit answer on an essay exam usually has this sort of goal in mind (see Malady 2013). As Frankfurt (2005, 63) notes, “the production of bullshit is stimulated whenever a person’s obligations or opportunities to speak about some topic exceed his knowledge of the facts.”

9. Other sorts of counter-examples to what Frankfurt says about bullshit have been proposed (see Cohen 2002, Carson 2010, 60-62, Wreen 2013, 108-110). In this paper, I just focus on the proposed counter-examples to his central characterization of bullshit.

10. When a speaker violates Paul Grice’s (1989, 27) second maxim of quality, “Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence,” it is often because she lacks a concern for the inquiry getting to the truth. This may explain why some philosophers (e.g., Fallis 2009, 30-31, Dynel 2011, 152-53) have suggested that violating this maxim is definitive of bullshit. However, as the case of Carson’s exam taker (see below in this section) shows, someone can obey this maxim and still be bullshitting. Also, as the case of Augustine’s fourth type of lie (see below in the next section) shows, someone can violate this maxim and not be bullshitting.

11. Another example of a speaker whose concern with the truth does not have the right direction of fit is the “wishful thinker.” In any event, it is important to note that my analysis of bullshitting is restricted to cases where someone is making assertions about facts that are independent of what she says about them. Someone who is creating a new fictional character, for instance, is not bullshitting despite the fact that she wants things to be true of her character simply by virtue of her saying them. Thanks to Joe Ulatowski for pointing out this limitation.

12. Admittedly, even a “true believer” like the talk radio fan might pay *some* attention to relevant evidence and still be bullshitting. However, I do not think that this possibility ultimately undercuts my analysis. It just indicates that bullshit may be a matter of degree. In other words, the degree to which someone is bullshitting may be inversely proportional to the degree to which she cares about the inquiry getting to the truth. But, I set aside this potential complication for purposes of this paper.

13. Exams are somewhat unusual contexts because students, whether or not they are bullshitting, are not trying to share their knowledge. Since the professor already knows the answer to the exam question, students are just trying to show the professor that they also know. Even so, it is completely clear what the aim of the inquiry is in such contexts.

14. Even if someone wanted to deny that the talk radio fan and/or the exam taker are bullshitting on the grounds that they do believe what they are saying, they would still be producing bullshit of this sort. Along similar lines, we might also say that any assertion that *advances* the inquiry is *not* bullshit even if the speaker is bullshitting and this epistemically beneficial result is just an accident (cf. De Waal 2006, 100).

15. In addition, someone might innocently pass along bullshit without herself bullshitting, in the same way that someone might innocently pass along a lie without herself lying. But, Frankfurt presumably *is* interested in this sort of bullshit because the assertion was originally made by someone who was bullshitting.

16. Thelma needs the set of possible worlds to be narrowed down in order to achieve

her goal. But, someone who is bullshitting might instead intend the set to be opened up. For instance, if Dick says, “Even this time of year, it could be cold in Chicago if it is really windy,” not because he knows that this is true, but just because he has a windbreaker that he would like to sell me, he seems to be bullshitting.

17. For similar reasons, my analysis counts as bullshit what Carson (2010, 60) calls “evasive bullshit” (such as when a politician responds to a reporter’s question without actually being responsive). If a speaker is being evasive, she definitely cares about the inquiry going a certain way. In particular, she is very concerned that the inquiry not uncover certain embarrassing facts. But, much like Louise, a speaker who is being evasive does not (usually) care whether or not the inquiry gets to the *truth*. She wants to hide the embarrassing facts because they are embarrassing, not because they are facts. That is, she wants her audience not to believe certain things regardless of whether they happen to be true or false.

18. The only difference is that Louise happens to know what happens to be true.

19. The fact that someone lacks any concern about the inquiry getting to the truth does not mean that she might not very careful about what she says. Frankfurt (2005, 21-22) admits that “it does seem fitting to construe carelessly made, shoddy goods as in some way analogues of bullshit. ... the notion of carefully wrought bullshit involves ... a certain inner strain.” However, as Frankfurt (2005, 22-23) goes on to point out, “the realms of advertising and of public relations, and the nowadays closely related realm of politics, are replete with instances of bullshit ... And in these realms there are exquisitely sophisticated craftsmen who ... dedicate themselves tirelessly to getting every word and image they produce exactly right.”

20. I would like to thank Thomas Carson, Tony Doyle, Kay Mathiesen, Jörg Meibauer, Eliot Michaelson, Andrew Peet, Alexander Pruss, Jennifer Saul, Yotam Shmargad, Roy Sorensen, Andreas Stokke, Joe Ulatowski, Dan Zelinski, and an audience at the 2014 Annual Conference of the New Mexico Texas Philosophical Society for helpful feedback.