

Final Paper: Operation Gander Sauce

The Scenario

Suppose that you work for a Texas-based NGO, Texans for Texas (**TT**), that supports Texas Democratic political candidates, and that you, personally, support Democratic candidates. Suppose, also, that the next election is approaching. Your boss, Alicia Briggs, has sent you an email soliciting your ethical advice on an issue of immediate importance.

Ms. Briggs writes that a document drafted by the Texas Republican Party—leaked to the press—states that it plans “to use a disinformation campaign to help them win back a dozen state House races in the next election, buying up website domains that look like they belong to Democratic candidates and loading the sites with negative information.”¹ She refers to this tactic as “**Website Spoofing**.”

Ms. Briggs is worried that the Texas Republican Party’s Website Spoofing could significantly hurt Texas Democratic candidates in the next election. She believes that Website Spoofing is *dishonest and deceptive* (and, for purposes of this assignment, you believe that she is correct in this regard). Because of these concerns, Ms. Briggs has gotten advice on this issue from a political consultant named Charles Dominguez. Mr. Dominguez told Ms. Briggs that “*Texas Democratic candidates will suffer a significant electoral disadvantage if they do not adopt the same unsavory tactics as Republicans.*” Sensing Ms. Briggs’ discomfort with the idea of engaging in Website Spoofing, Mr. Dominguez went on to say that “*when it comes to political candidates and political parties using these kinds of dirty tactics, the situation is going to have to get worse before it gets better. This is because, in our gridlocked political system, you won’t get laws against these practices until both political parties, the Democrats and the Republicans, are tired of being targeted by these tactics.*”² (We will call what Mr. Dominguez has said, i.e., all the italicized sentences in this paragraph that appear in quotation marks,

¹ This is an actual quote from a newspaper story—except that I have modified the original quote by replacing “2020” with “the next election.” See Zelinski, Andrea, “Texas Republican Party plans to build phony campaign websites loaded with negative information about Democrats.” *Houston Chronicle*, 26 November, 2019 Updated: 27 November 27, 2019 10:01 a.m.

² This quote is based on something from a real-life news story. It is the view of an actual individual who has used ethically questionable tactics, on behalf of Democratic candidates, against Republicans. I say this only so that you understand that this has been put forward as a serious view in real life. I am not providing the source of the statement that I paraphrase in the fictitiously quoted statement as I do not want students to be distracted by irrelevant materials. However, if you are interested—as a personal matter not related to this paper—I can provide the source upon request after the semester is over.

the “**Pessimistic Advice.**”) Ms. Briggs is now convinced that, at least when it comes to Website Spoofing, the Pessimistic Advice is true.

As a result of all of these considerations, Ms. Briggs is considering using TT funds and staff to implement exactly the same kind of Website Spoofing strategy against Texas Republican candidates in the next election. To do so, she would hire Mr. Dominguez as a consultant. He would develop and supervise the project with the assistance of TT staff and funds. The proposed project is called “**Gander Sauce.**”

Your Task

1. Ms. Briggs wants you write a paper that advises her as to whether, ethically speaking, TT should deploy Gander Sauce. Ultimately, *you must conclude one of the following*:
 - (i) *Implementing* Gander Sauce is, ethically speaking, the best thing to do;
 - OR
 - (ii) *Not implementing* Gander sauce is, ethically speaking, the best thing to do.

Ms. Briggs tells you that, in making your analysis, you are to assume that the Pessimistic Advice is true.

2. Your primary framework for making your analysis is Deontology. That is to say, you must make an analysis in terms of the relevant duties involved. Use your common sense and knowledge of our shared moral norms to think about what kind of duties are involved in this decision. In addition, the materials on Epistemic Responsibility—broadly construed—should help you to take your thinking about what duties are relevant even further in making your analysis. If two or more duties clash, explain which duty (or duties) should prevail, and why they should prevail. This means that you are going to have to clearly distinguish between Positive Duties and Negative Duties.
3. Your secondary framework for making your analysis is Consequentialism. You should assess what factors are in play from a Consequentialist standpoint. When applying Consequentialism, you will have to specify which sorts of things you take to be Intrinsically Valuable. Just do your best to pick plausible things. I am not expecting you to specify some deep theory of what is Intrinsically Valuable. Nor am I expecting that you can rigorously quantify what is at stake. *Crucially, you must also consider whether there might be Consequentialist considerations that override a duty (or duties) that would otherwise prevail in this decision.*

4. Do NOT write about duties to oneself. In practice, if not in theory, such considerations usually turn out to be a lot of self-serving baloney with no real significance in comparison with the serious moral issues at hand.
5. When discussing duties, make sure that you are dealing with moral duties and how to fulfill them. Thus, legal duties are only indirectly relevant. In addition, neither your (the advisor's) self-interest, nor the self-interest of Ms. Briggs, nor the self-interest of Texans for Texas, nor the self-interest of the Democratic Party are immediately relevant considerations—again, the analysis has to do with moral duties and Consequentialist considerations. Thus, the issue is not, in any direct way, that of how to further the political interests of the Democratic Party in this scenario. Therefore, the point is not to give strategic advice on how to win elections. In an assignment like this, that would generally amount to unfounded armchair speculation about what wins or loses elections, and that is not worth much even from the standpoint of political strategy. For worthwhile thoughts on political strategy, we would need to do empirical research in political science, sociology, psychology, and economics—which is not what this course is about. Of course, it may be that we can reasonably assume that Democrats believe that their policy prescriptions are better for the United States and its people than the Republican Party's political prescriptions. In that sense, there is, indirectly, a moral consideration raised by the possibility of success or failure in an election. However, that is pretty facile and generic, and doesn't really get to the specific facts of the case.
6. Please remember, you do NOT have to actually support an organization to carry out an exercise where you imagine yourself to be a supporter of that organization in order to ask you out certain tasks to show your understanding of the course materials. This assignment has nothing to do with your actual personal political views. They are irrelevant to the task because they are irrelevant to what you are to learn in this course. (*I am trying to elicit a demonstration of what you learned in this course.*) Nor do I have any personal interest in what your political views are. As far as I am concerned, a student's personal political views are none of my business, and I would not ask students to reveal them in an assignment.
7. *Think about this assignment from a grading standpoint: I am trying to elicit from you a demonstration that you learned the relevant concepts and principles (i.e., as we learned them in this course) and how to apply them. That is the basis for the*

assessment and grading of this assignment. In this light, the significance of the requirements set forth above in these instructions should be clear.

Paper Requirements

- 8.** The paper must be 1,250-1,750 words in length.
- 9.** The paper must be submitted online (via Canvas).
- 10.** You must submit your work in .doc or .docx format.
- 11.** Your paper should be type-written, double-spaced and in Verdana 11-point font. In the upper left-hand corner of the first page, type your full name, "Long Paper," and "Philosophy 2306. Make sure that your name and the page number appear in a footer on every page. Do not make a separate cover page.
- 12.** Your paper should follow the traditional essay format consisting of the following.
 - a. An opening paragraph wherein you briefly explain what you will do in the body of the paper. (Do not load this with a lot of fluff.)
 - b. The body of the paper wherein you carry out the substance of your analysis (i.e., address the assigned topic).
 - c. A concluding paragraph wherein you review and draw together what you have done in the body of the paper. (Do not load this with a lot of fluff.)
- 13.** Do not assume that the reader of your paper is familiar with what has been read or discussed in this class. You should write as if you are addressing your paper to a reasonably intelligent adult who has no prior familiarity with the relevant ethical and philosophical concepts. As such, you should make every effort to explain the ideas you discuss and the quotations you use in straightforward language that generally conveys meaning to your reader. You should explain any technical or philosophical term that you use in your paper. At the point in the paper where you define or explain such a term, put that term in **bold font**. I should be able to immediately locate your explanation or definition of each such term in your paper—i.e., because it is in bold font. *I will not be obliged to find each of these items in your paper and give you credit for it if you have not followed this instruction.*

14. The paper must be written in accord with the conventions of Standard Written English. Your paper will be evaluated in part in terms of spelling, grammar, and overall structure.

15. Use only the materials from this course and the following article in writing this paper. ***Outside sources are forbidden! The use of outside sources will be deemed academic dishonesty!***

- Zelinski, Andrea, "Texas Republican Party plans to build phony campaign websites loaded with negative information about Democrats." *Houston Chronicle*, 26 November, 2019 Updated: 27 November 27, 2019 10:01 a.m.

I will provide you with a copy of this article.

16. You must use direct quotations from the readings assigned in class to support your claims.

17. If you are using materials used in this course to inform your thoughts and ideas, but NOT directly quoting them, you do NOT have to give a citation.

18. When quoting from materials used in this course, provide a citation for each such quotation at the point in your paper where it appears. For materials from this course, you only need to provide the title of the relevant document and the page(s) from which the quoted material comes. Remember: You MUST provide page numbers in your citations! If you fail to do these things—if you, for instance, simply put a bibliography of sources at the end of the paper—you will fail this course for plagiarism.

19. Any student who engages in Academic Dishonesty or Plagiarism as defined in the syllabus for this course, with respect to this Final Paper, will receive an F for this course. This is stipulated in the course syllabus. Review these matters in the syllabus before you begin working on this paper.

20. Assume that the facts that I have stipulated in this assignment are true. Assume that Zelinski's article accurately reports what her sources have said and what the relevant documents say (though you may find that some of *people* she quotes describe things rather differently from one another). In other words, within these parameters, do not try to argue that the facts are wrong. That is not what this assignment is about.

Further, do not invent new facts that are not in these materials. Similarly, you should not raise hypothetical "possibilities" of a kind that have no rational weight. For example, in a life-or-death decision, saying that it is OK if so-and-so dies because

"Who knows? Maybe he was a mass murderer!" is obviously a bogus move. I could just as well reply, "Who knows? Maybe he was about to invent the cure for cancer!" Clearly, this is pointless.

On the other hand, it is appropriate to make well-grounded, reasonable, conservative inferences from the facts you are given. However, relying upon unsupported or poorly supported inferences from the facts as a part of your analysis is, of course, improper. Suppose, for example, we have a scenario involving someone named Jane. If Jane says she loves dogs, and we have a reasonable basis for taking Jane at her word, then we could reasonably infer that Jane is, in fact, very fond of dogs. Moving on from there (with no further information) to say that Jane might well be a radical animal liberation activist ... well, that is taking things a step too far. Going on from there to cite the "possibility" that Jane might be a radical animal liberation activist as support for the conclusion (or a sub-conclusion) of one's "analysis" is, of course, completely out of court.

- 21.** Do NOT put any questions in your paper. This includes a prohibition against any rhetorical questions. Write in declarative sentences. Note that one cannot get past this requirement by grafting a question onto the end of what starts out as a declarative sentence and then ending this string of words with a period. For example, "John is wrong about what Bill said because how could he know."
- 22.** Carry out the assigned task clearly, precisely, concisely, and completely. Do not write: fluff; BS; clichés; platitudes; empty generalizations; irrelevant expressions of feeling; unsupported fact claims; off-point digressions; self-aggrandizing statements—including affirmations as to how deeply moral one is; self-congratulatory statements; flattery aimed at the instructor; empty rhetoric; purple prose; one's general views about life, religion, ethics ... or whatever; and so on.
- 23.** Please note that it is the "Democratical Party," not the "Democrat Party." The latter is an invention of Republicans in an attempt to stigmatize their political opposition. Grammatically, the latter makes no sense. Moreover, we address people and organizations by their own official name, or by another name that *they prefer to be called* (i.e., a nickname [e.g., "skooter" or "bonzo" or "Grand Old Party" {for the Republican Party}], or a derivative of a name [e.g., "Chuck" instead of "Charles" or "GOP" instead of "Grand Old Party."]). I think that you would find it quite rude and would feel affronted if I decided to call you "Lanky" or "Flabby" in all situations, formal and informal, despite your repeated requests that I cease. Therefore, when you are

doing an analysis, you address people and organizations by their correct name—especially in a scenario where you are to imagine that your job is to support that organization. Think about it from a grading standpoint. If I see "Democrat Party" in a paper, my alarm bell goes off and I think "Oh God! Here comes another political screed!" I don't want a political screed from the left or the right or the center or anywhere else. So even if you think that the Democratic Party is effectively the Legion of Satan, it is both professionally appropriate, and in your self-interest, to call them the "Democratic Party" in this assignment.

- 24.** There may be more important issues than can be handled within the compass of a paper of this length. Just use your judgment in selecting the most important things to talk about.
- 25.** Your job is to show mastery of the relevant concepts and the ability to apply them in a thoughtful and insightful analysis. Your grade depends on the quality of your analysis, not which of the two stipulated possible conclusions you reach. In other words, I am interested in how you make your case, not which side of the issue you come down on. However, you must ultimately come down on one side or the other.