Harry G. Frankfurt, 76, is a moral philosopher of international reputation and a professor emeritus at Princeton. He is also the author of a book recently published by the Princeton University Press that is the first in the publishing house's distinguished history to carry a title most newspapers, including this one, would find unfit to print. The work is called "On Bull..."

The opening paragraph of the 67-page essay is a model of reason and composition, repeatedly disrupted by that single obscenity:

"One of the most salient features of our culture is that there is so much [bull]. Everyone knows this. Each of us contributes his share. But we tend to take the situation for granted. Most people are rather confident of their ability to recognize [bull] and to avoid being taken in by it. So the phenomenon has not aroused much deliberate concern, nor attracted much sustained inquiry."

The essay goes on to lament that lack of inquiry, despite the universality of the phenomenon. "Even the most basic and preliminary questions about [bull] remain, after all," Mr. Frankfurt writes, "not only unanswered but unasked."

The balance of the work tries, with the help of Wittgenstein, Pound, St. Augustine and the spy novelist Eric Ambler, among others, to ask some of the preliminary questions - to define the nature of a thing recognized by all but understood by none.

What is [bull], after all? Mr. Frankfurt points out it is neither fish nor fowl. Those who produce it certainly

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Between Truth and Lies, An Unprintable Ubiquity

By PETER EDIDIN
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