PS 506, Spring 2015: Deception and Politics

Monday/Wednesday 2:30-3:45, 5231 Social Science

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I. Scope and Purpose

Deceptive politicians loom large in the popular imagination, whether it’s Frank Underwood of House of Cards, Lonesome Rhodes of A Face in the Crowd, or Willie Stark of All the King’s Men. And it’s not just a matter of fiction – history abounds with different sorts of deceivers: Alcibiades in classical Athens, Sejanus in first century Rome, Francesco Sforza in 15th century Italy, Cardinal Richelieu in 17th century France, Benedict Arnold in the 18th century, and Stalin and Hitler in the 20th century, to name but a few. Politicians regularly accuse each other of lying; websites, such as PolitiFact.com, rate politicians’ claims on a scale ranging from “True” to “Pants on Fire” (and even the fact checkers are now being fact checked); grainy footage of politicians with assorted accusations of dishonesty (along with eerie music) are standards of political advertising; and woe to the democratic politician who can plausibly be accused of hypocrisy, as John Kerry found out to his chagrin in 2004. Lying seems to be so prevalent in politics that José Maria de Eça de Queiroz, the great 19th century Portuguese novelist, remarked: “Politicians and diapers should be changed frequently and all for the same reason.”

How accurate this remark is on a factual level is a topic that is of secondary concern to this course. Instead, we will explore deception – and truth telling – as matters of fundamental political concern. Writers ranging from Plato to John Rawls have grappled with the problem of deception and truth-telling in politics. Flattery, hypocrisy, lying as a matter of state, lying as a matter of policy: philosophical explorations of these and related phenomena are at the center of this course. Does politics – and especially democratic politics – pose an obstacle to truth telling? Is deception in its various forms an intrinsic part of political life? If it is an intrinsic part of politics, should we worry about it less? Is deception necessarily a bad thing in the first place?
What harms – whether individual or collective – are prevented by truth telling? If deception is bad for politics – or perhaps democratic politics – what can we do about it?

These are just some of the questions we will explore throughout this course. We will encounter different answers to these questions, ranging from works of Plato written in the 4th century BCE to an essay by John Rawls published in 1997. The course will be organized both chronologically and thematically. That is, we will encounter the majority texts in the order in which they were written, and we will approach them as two broad units: “Deception and Politics”, and “Truth and Politics.” The third unit of the course – “Framing a Solution” – focuses on the debates over the ratification of the American Constitution with an eye towards the way in which the Federalists and Anti-Federalists understood the relationship between truth, politics, and institutions. The fourth unit of the course centers on a recent book, Allen’s Talking to Strangers, which pushes us to think beyond the dichotomy of reason and emotion, and is thus called “Moving Beyond Reason.” The fifth and final unit of the course, “Putting it to the Test,” will entail us watching and discussing a film centering on deception as a way of exploring the theories and arguments we’ve encountered.

II. Course Objectives

1. To read and analyze a survey of texts dealing with fundamental questions of deception, truth, and politics.

2. To explore and analyze how political and ethical theories are formulated, and to critically evaluate their strengths and weaknesses.

3. To explore and analyze how different political and ethical theories relate to each other.

4. To explore and analyze the ways in which works of political theory may inform, illuminate, and enrich contemporary political and ethical discussions.

5. To analyze and evaluate contemporary culture and individual experience through the lens of philosophical texts.

Through their careful and close engagement with course material, class attendance and participation, and completion of course work, students will develop the following capacities: verbal communication and presentation; expository, analytical, and reflective writing; critical analysis of arguments, concepts, and theories; teamwork and flexibility; and independent research.

III. Assignments

A. Papers (60%)

Students enrolled in this course will write 3 short (6-8) page papers. These papers are to be critical analyses of a creative work – a novel, play, film, television episode, poem, opera, album,
etc. – through the theoretical framework provided by one of the course texts. A critical analysis involves asking an interpretive question about the creative work, and developing an answer to that question through the lens of a course text. For example, if we were reading Machiavelli’s *Prince* in this course, it might remind you of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and the interpretive puzzles it raises for the viewer or reader. An interpretive question might be, “Why can’t Hamlet bring himself to act decisively?” An answer – in the form of a thesis statement – might be, “Drawing on Machiavelli’s *Prince*, I will argue that Hamlet is unable to act decisively because he does not know how not to be good.” Each paper will be worth 20% of the overall grade. The first paper is due on or by **Wednesday, October 12**; the second paper is due on or by **Monday, November 14**; the third paper is due on or by **Monday, December 12**.

Papers are to be handed in on paper and typed in 12 point Times New Roman font. Citation style is to adhere to the *American Political Science Review* format, which you can find discussed at length through this link:

[http://acme.highpoint.edu/~msetzler/generalissues/APSRcitation.htm](http://acme.highpoint.edu/~msetzler/generalissues/APSRcitation.htm).

Late papers will be penalized in the following fashion: ½ letter grade off for papers turned in after the regular meeting time (MW 2:30-3:45), but on the due date AND before the close of the Political Science office closes (4:45 pm); 1 full letter grade per day for papers turned in after 4:45 pm on the due date. For the first paper, you can write on Plato (*Gorgias*), Plato (*Republic*), or Machiavelli. For the second paper, you can write on Hobbes, Mandeville, Rousseau, Milton, or Smith. For the third paper, you can write on Mill, Arendt, Rawls, the *Federalist Papers*, Anti-Federalists, or Allen.

B. Section (20%)

Discussion section will be worth 20% of your overall course grade. Your teaching assistant will hand out a detailed section syllabus on the first day of section.

C. Final (20%)

All students in this class will take a final exam worth 20% of the overall grade. It will be a take-home exam. The exam will be due during the scheduled exam time (12:25-2:25 pm on December 23).

IV. Grading

Grades will be assigned based on the following scale:

- A ≥ 93.5
- AB = 87.5-93.4
- B = 82.5-87.4
- BC = 77.5-82.4
- C = 69.5-77.4
- D = 60-69.4
- F ≤ 59.9

V. Course Materials
Students in PS 506 are expected to acquire the following 8 books, all of which are also on reserve at College Library.

Plato, *Republic* (Hackett) 0872207366

Plato, *Gorgias* (Hackett) 0872200167

Mill, *On Liberty* (Hackett) 0915144433

Rousseau, *Of the Social Contract* (Hackett) 087220068X

Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees and Other Writings* (Hackett) 0872203743

Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Hackett) 0872203166

Allen, *Talking to Strangers* (Chicago) 9780226014678

Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Hackett) 0872201775

*The Essential Federalist and Anti-Federalist Papers* (Hackett) 9780872206557

In addition to these required readings, those reading marked with an asterisk (*) will be made available via Learn@UW.

VI. Class Expectations

You can expect me, as your instructor, and your teaching assistant to come to class prepared, to be available for assistance during office hours or by mutually convenient appointment, to answer email correspondence in a reasonable amount of time *(provided your email uses proper punctuation, grammar, spelling, appellation, and is signed)*, to provide feedback on your performance, to hand back written work in a reasonable amount of time, and to provide clear instructions and guidelines. You can expect your teaching assistant or me to discuss questions about evaluation of assignments in person and no sooner than 24 hours after assignments have been returned.

I expect you, as students, to come to class prepared to engage in the material and on time, to be attentive and respectful in class, to check your university-registered email regularly, to read and understand the syllabus and other course guidelines, in addition to adhering to all university policies and policies stated in the syllabus. Students may not use laptops, cellular phones, or similar items in this class, with the exception of devices for displaying e-texts.

**Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated, and will be dealt with severely. For information on academic honesty, see [http://students.wisc.edu/doso/acadintegrity.html](http://students.wisc.edu/doso/acadintegrity.html).**

This syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations may occur.
Wednesday, September 7: No reading; course introduction

I. Deception and Politics

Democracy is a Problem

Monday, September 12: Plato, Gorgias

The “Big Lie,” and Why

Wednesday, September 14: Plato, Gorgias, cont’d; Plato, Republic I and II

Monday, September 19: Plato, Republic II, cont’d; III

Wednesday, September 21: Plato, Republic III, cont’d; IV

Monday, September 26: Plato, Republic V, X

There’s a Sucker Born Every Minute

Wednesday, September 28: Machiavelli, The Prince

Monday, October 3: Machiavelli, The Prince

You Can’t Say That

Wednesday, October 5: Hobbes, Leviathan Chapters I-VI, X, XIII

Monday, October 10: Hobbes, Leviathan Chapters XIV-XV, XVIII-XIX, XXI, XXIX-XXXI

Wednesday, October 12: Hobbes, cont’d; Paper 1 Due

I’m a Hypocrite, and So Can You


Wednesday, October 19: The Third Dialogue and The Sixth Dialogue (Fable of the Bees, Volume II; pages 160-195)

The Stories We Tell Ourselves

Monday, October 24: Rousseau, Social Contract, Book 1, Chapters 1-7; Book 2, Chapters 1-10

Wednesday, October 26: Rousseau, Social Contract, Book 2, Chapters 1-10, cont’d; Book 4, Chapters 1, 8

II. Truth and Politics
The Truth Shall Set You Free
Monday, October 31: Milton, *Areopagitica*

A Language of Sympathy
Wednesday, November 2: Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (selections TBA)
Monday, November 7: Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (selections TBA)

Beyond Conformity
Wednesday, November 9: Mill, *On Liberty*
Monday, November 14: Mill, *On Liberty*; Paper 2 Due

Truth is the Matter of Politics
Wednesday, November 16: Arendt, “Truth and Politics”*

Democracy Need Not be the Problem

Wednesday, November 23: No class; Thanksgiving

III. Framing a Solution
Monday, November 28: *The Essential Federalist and Anti-Federalist Papers* (selections TBA)
Wednesday, November 30: *The Essential Federalist and Anti-Federalist Papers* (selections TBA)

IV. Moving Beyond Reason
Monday, December 5: Allen, *Talking to Strangers*

Wednesday, December 7: Allen, *Talking to Strangers*

V. Putting it to the Test
Monday, December 12: Film (TBA); Paper 3 Due

Wednesday, December 14: Film and discussion; Conclusions