Truth, Lies, and Opinion
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In 2016, Oxford Dictionaries declared "post-truth" the word of the year. This move spoke to the widespread contemporary concerns about the erosion of knowledge and facts in public discourse and about the growth of "fake news." Similar worries have recurred throughout political history. Plato's *The Republic* is saturated by anxieties about Athenian democracy's relationship to the truth, and in a classic 1945 essay Alexandre Koyré warned that, "Never has there been so much lying as in our day. Never has lying been so shameless, so systematic, so unceasing."

In this course, we will reflect and gain clarity on the role of truth and lies in the political realm (particularly in *democratic* politics) and on their relationship to the concept of opinion. We will do so through collaborative close readings of essays drawn from the history of political thought. The course is divided into three segments.

We will first consider the role of truth and lies in governing. Is politics a domain where lies and cunning (realpolitik) are bound to reign supreme, and, if so, is there any positive value to politicians' predilection for untruths? Why should politics be a domain where rulers are truthful and the people sincere? To assess these questions, we begin by considering Plato's views in *The Republic*, before turning to readings by Immanuel Kant, Alexander Koyré, Charles Mills, Gandhi, Vaclav Havel, Machiavelli, Michael Walzer, and Lisa Wedeen.

Second, we will complicate diagnoses of a "post-truth" world by confronting the arguments of philosophers who since the nineteenth century have unsettled have what it means to appeal to "truth." How should we draw the line between truth and lie given the varying ideologies and perspectives through which people apprehend the world? Can we take this plurality and perspectivism into account without thereby also concluding that the concepts of "truth" and validity are obsolete? We will use Friedrich Nietzsche's "Truth and Lies in an Extra Moral Sense" as our starting point, and we will then move to writings by Michel Foucault, Sandra Harding, Joan Scott, Charles Taylor, and Bernard Williams.

Third, we will consider how truth can reconciled with a specifically *democratic* politics. Democracy is organized around giving voice to people's conflicting opinions, and around the principle that political power should be enjoyed by all regardless of the epistemic competence that they possess. To what extent does an insistence on truthfulness and factuality threaten this democratic commitment to conflict, opinion, partisanship, and equality? If there is indeed a tension, which side should we prioritize, and can we identify ways to alleviate it? To consider these thorny dilemmas, we will read John Dewey's *The Public and its Problems*, followed by essays by Hannah Arendt, Michael Lynch, Chantal Mouffe, Robert Post, and Lea Ypi.

Each student will also learn to develop a research paper by identifying an issue of interest related to the course, formulating a question about it, identifying and developing a bibliography, and presenting their work to the class.