The course will examine the attitudes to lie, falsity, and dissimulation in pre-modern European society. We shall begin by exploring the concepts of lie and discussions of permissibility of lying in canonical texts of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. We shall focus on the texts composed between the 16th and the 18th centuries and explore questions posed by theologians (“Is lying always a sin?”), “Can one lie to protect lives?”, “Can God lie?”), philosophers and politicians (“Are the rulers subject to different morality than the ruled?”, “Are politicians bound to lie?”), and courtiers (“Is not telling the truth a necessary part of being polite?”, “Is all civility based on falsehood?”). We shall then move beyond the question of lying and probe the questions of dissimulation, self-fashioning, and false or invented identities. We shall end with a discussion of early romantic “cult of sincerity”.

Learning Goals:

The main goal of this course is to acquaint the student with an important historical phenomenon. However, in an age in which the questions of the permissibility of lying and self-invented identities are on a foray, the course may have some contemporary significance.

Required Texts:


Course Requirements:

This seminar puts heavy emphasis on close reading and careful analysis of the reading assignments. The reading assignments listed below a given session should be completed by the date under which they appear. In order for us to have the intense, exciting give-and-take that a class like this allows and deserves, we need to talk to each other and pay attention to our shared texts. **I will ask you to put away your laptops, phones, and other multi-use screens for the duration of each class session.** Fountain pens are not, strictly speaking, required, but are highly recommended. **Given that I do not want electronics in the classroom, you should either print the required readings and bring them to class and/or bring a hardcopy of the books that contain the selections.**

The final decision on any grade derives from my global assessment of your work and cannot be quantified exactly. Roughly speaking, however, the breakdown is as follows:

- Participation: 40%
- First assignment (3-pages): 20%
- One 10-page final paper: 40%

No extensions will be granted without my *prior* permission, and late papers will be graded lower at the rate of one grade-step per day (A to A-, A- to B+, etc). Needless to say, complete honesty and probity in your work is a must. For information, see [http://ethics.jhu.edu](http://ethics.jhu.edu)

If you are a student with a disability or believe you might have a disability that requires accommodations, please contact Dr. Richard Sanders, in Student Disability Services, 385 Garland, (410) 516-4720, studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Please note: syllabus is a map, not the territory. Readings may change as we go on. Pay attention to class announcements.

08/30: Christian foundations

Required Readings:

The New Testament, Galatians 2-3


Suggested readings:

09/06: Jewish foundations

Required Readings:

The Hebrew Bible, Genesis 18:12-13; 50:16-17
Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 65b, Ketubot 16b


Recommended reading:


09/13: Muslim Foundations

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


Assignment: write a brief comparison of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim attitudes to lying.

09/20: Machiavelli and Raison d'etat

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


**09/27: Nicodemism and Crypto-Catholicism**

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


**Assignment due**

**10/04: Court Culture**

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


**10/11: The Conversos and Crypto-Judaism**
Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


10/18: Theatre of the World

Required Readings:

Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Life is a Dream*


Recommended Readings:


10/25: Dissimulating in the New World

Required Readings:


11/01: Casuistry and Mental Reservation

Required Readings:


Recommended Reading:


**11/08: Libertinism**

Required Reading:


**11/15: Libertinism II**

Movie: Milos Forman, Valmont (1989)

**11/29 The Rhetoric of Frankness**

Required Readings:


Recommended Reading:

12/6 Atheism

Readings to be announced