Speech Attacks: Bullshit, Lies, and Propaganda
DRAFT Syllabus: Subject to Change
Spring 2020

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Office Hour: 1-2pm Wednesday
Lecture: 2-3pm, Friday Edith-Morley G44
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Course Overview

Linguistic behavior undeniably plays an essential role in human society, both in reinforcing structural inequalities and offering promise of undermining them. However, linguistic theory, the scientific study of language, has, for large chunks of its history, more-or-less deliberately excluded such phenomena from its purview. In this course, we will look at work which aims to rectify this oversight and provide theoretically grounded accounts of the interactions between language and society. We will focus on instances in which language is used for nefarious purposes, such as the bullshit, lies, and propaganda mentioned in the course title.

The course will be loosely structured around a set of pairs of papers, one of which presents a traditional picture of language while the other aims to show the way in which social context is relevant to this kind of linguistic theorizing. This can include either showing how these traditional tools can shed light on these socio-political phenomena, or how these phenomena call for an amendment or complication to these theoretical approaches.

The aim of the course is to give students both the grounding in these traditional topics of philosophical studies of meaning and communication and to see how these tools can be used to better understand the social facts around which our societies are structured.

Course Difficulty

While there are no prerequisites for this course, it will be intellectually demanding—requiring you to master novel theoretical concepts and critically engage with complex arguments in your own writing. As with many other courses, to do well in PP3SPA you will need to:

- Attend all lectures and seminars and take (mental or physical) notes;

- Complete all the course readings, slowly and carefully, typically multiple times;

- Prepare your presentation in advance, reflecting carefully on reading and lectures;

- Work hard on your papers, including proof-reading and re-drafting multiple times, and submit them on time.

- **Optional, but highly recommended:** Meet with me to discuss questions regarding the course material or your paper topics.

This class is not about memorizing facts or correctly reproducing slogans; this class is about developing your own opinions and critical perspective on the topics discussed and enriching your ability to articulate and defend those opinions in a written form. Students who are prepared to work hard, challenge themselves, and attend lecture and section regularly will do well.

For pro-tips on reading and writing philosophy:
https://sites.google.com/a/wellesley.edu/pinkguidetophilosophy/

Course Materials

There will be no official textbook for the course. All of the required readings will be available digitally through the course webpage. Please check the course website regularly for updates.

If you are interested in reading further into a topic than the assigned readings, please let me know and I can suggest some material. Another good place to look is the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

Course Requirements

1. **Paper 1:** 30% of final grade.

2. **Paper 2:** 60% of final grade.

3. **In-Class Presentation** 10% of final grade.

4. **Be familiar with and abide by the University of Reading's policy on Academic Integrity:** This policy can be found at:
   https://libguides.reading.ac.uk/academicintegrity/about

   - Students needing an academic accommodation based on a disability should notify the Disability Advisory Service (disability@reading.ac.uk, 0118 378 4202). When possible, students should contact the DAS within the first two weeks of the quarter, as reasonable notice is needed to coordinate accommodations.

   - Unless requested by the DAS, ***The use of computers, phones, and tablets is not allowed in lecture.*** This component of the course's requirements is not intended to be mean or punitive, but rather to aid your understanding — and the understanding of those around you — of the contents of the lectures.

5. **Late assignments:** Late papers will be docked by 10% for every 24 hour period after the due date up to 5 days. After this, the paper will receive no credit. Extensions may be granted if you have a valid reason, For an extension, you must contact the School of Humanities. For details see the course website.

Lectures and Seminars

Friday's class will be dedicated to lecture, in which I will present a brief overview of that week's material. I will also set aside the first half-hour of Wednesday's class for finishing up any material not completed in the previous Friday's class and for me to raise any topics I think are particularly suitable for investigation. After this, there will be student presentations and student-led discussion. Any remaining time will be for general reflections and debate. The boundary between lecture and seminar will, however, be a fluid one. Student participation (questions, objections, etc.) during lecture is highly

encouraged.

For seminars, I would like students who are not presenting to come to class armed with several questions to ask about the material. I may cold-call students for these questions. **Note: Week 1 will be slightly differently organized, as there is no previous week's material to present on. In week 1, Wednesday's class will be a general introduction to/overview of the course, and a lecture on the first readings. Friday's class will be a discussion of this material. So please read the readings associated with week 1 (Austin and Langton) in advance.**

Classroom Etiquette

Classroom participation is strongly encouraged. The best way to learn philosophy is to *do* philosophy, and this involves discussion and argumentation, in the flesh as well as in written work. Such discussion may get heated and this is OK. However, what is not OK is behavior that discourages other students from engaging. Finding the line between passionate debate and personal attack is a vital skill for anyone in or outside of academia.

All other students in the classroom must be treated respectfully, as peers engaged in a collective activity. Behavior that will not be tolerated includes, but is not limited to: dismissing another student's opinion, talking over another student, personal attacks etc. In short: Don't be a jerk. Class discussion is every student's opportunity to engage with the material, and behavior which impedes this will not be tolerated.

Content Warning

Due to the nature of this course, course readings and discussions will often focus on issues that are highly sensitive and potentially challenging and which are liable to provoke strong emotional reactions. Such topics will include: sexual violence, genocide, racism, sexism, and other forms of bigotry, etc. Different aspects of this content are liable to affect different students in different ways. Discussion of such topics will be handled, to the best of my ability and with the cooperation of students enrolled in the course, with as much care as possible. This will make abiding by the above-stated policy on classroom etiquette particularly important.

While I believe that discussion of such material is very important, and potentially empowering, it is not the role of this class to get students to "face their fears". If uncomfortable content in lecture or seminar is interfering with your ability to engage with the material and learn, feel free to step outside. If you would like information in advance about the content of particular readings, please ask me. If this material is preventing you from completing the required coursework, please speak to me and/or Reading's Counselling and Wellbeing services.

Course Papers

You will be assigned two papers, of equal length, but in increasing order of difficulty. The idea is that you will build up your philosophical skills of exegesis, argumentation, and novel contribution to philosophical inquiry. I will provide detailed feedback. In order to do well in this course, you will need to incorporate this feedback into later work.

All papers will be submitted online, via the course website. Please include a cover page including: your name, your student ID number, my name, the course name, and a title.

Paper 1

A prompt for paper 1, with options, will be assigned in the Friday lecture of week 3, to be submitted on the Friday of Week 5. This paper will be between 2000 and 2500 words long.

Paper 2

A prompt for paper 2, with options, will be assigned in the lecture of Week 9, to be submitted on the Friday of Week 11. This paper will be between 2000 and 2500 words long.

Presentation

Each student will be responsible for a brief in-class presentation. These will take place in the seminar session on Wednesday morning. Each student will be given 15 minutes, in which they will present some aspect of the material from the previous week's reading and will lead class discussion on this topic. This can include exposition, but should also go beyond the course reading, evaluating the argument/theory, applying it to novel cases, etc. Students may divide this 15 minutes up between presentation and discussion as they please, but should note that the assessment will be based on their contribution. As there are 46 students enrolled, and 9 weeks of class (not including day one), there will be usually 5 student presentations per week. I plan to set aside time after lecture on Friday to discuss the material with students presenting the following week.

I will pin a spreadsheet to my office door on which students can select a week in which to present. You may also e-mail me specifying your preference, and I will update the sheet accordingly. If 5 slots are not filled one week before the presentations are to be given, I will try and find some students in seminar to agree to present the following week. If I can't find enough volunteers, I will randomly select students who are not yet assigned to a week.

Reading Schedule

Readings marked with an '*' are recommended, but not required. Readings are to be read before lecture.

Week 1: Introduction/ Speech Acts

- Austin, J.L. *How to do Things with Words* (Chapters I, II, VIII, and IX)

- Langton, R. *Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts*

Week 2: Intention and Convention

- Strawson, P.F. *Intention and Convention in Speech Acts*

- Stanley, J. *How Propaganda Works* (Chapter 4)

- * Searle, J. *Language and Social Ontology*

Week 3: Saying, Implying, Conveying

- Grice, H.P. *Logic and Conversation*

- Saul, J. *Lying, Misleading, and What is Said* (Chapter 4)

Week 4: Language Games

- Lewis, D. *Scorekeeping in a Language Game*

- Tyrell, L. *Genocidal Language Games*

Week 5: Speech Act Pluralism

- Armstrong, J. *Truth and Imprecision*

- Saul, J. *Dogwhistles, Political Manipulation, and Philosophy of Language*

NO CLASS WEEK 6

Week 7: Expression

- Potts, C. *The Expressive Dimension*

- Camp, E. *Meta-Ethical Expressivism*

- Antaki, C. and Horowitz, A. *Using Identity Ascription to Disqualify a Rival Version of Events as "Interested"*

Week 8: Bullshit

- Frankfurt, H. *On Bullshit*

- * Longino, H. *Alan Sokal's "Transgressing Boundaries"*

- * Magee, B. *Sense and Nonsense*

- * Sperber, D. *The Guru Effect*

Week 9: Language and Identity

- Garcia Bedolla, L. *The Identity Paradox: Latino Language, Politics and Selective Dissociation*

- Pullum, G. *Linguistics: Why it Matters* (Chapter 4)

- * Senay, I. and Keysar, B. *Keeping Track of Speaker's Perspective: The Role of Social Identity*

- * Burnett, H. *Sociolinguistic Interaction and Identity Construction: The View From Game-Theoretic Pragmatics*

Week 10: Thinking Bad Thoughts

- Johnson, G. *The Structure of Bias*

- Leslie, S.J. *The Original Sin of Cognition: Fear, Prejudice, and Generalization*

- Swanson, E. *Slurs and Ideology*

Week 11: Language and The Spread of (Mis-)Information

- Sperber, D. *The Epidemiology of Beliefs*

- O'Connor, C. and Weatherall, J.. *The Misinformation Age: How False Beliefs Spread* (Chapter 3)