

Philosophy of (Bad) Language

Moral Issues of Speech and Expression

Philosophy [—]

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Course description:

Many contemporary moral issues are issues of language—they have to do with how we address each other and what we say, which words we use and who is able to use them, when someone is allowed to speak and where. This course has two goals: (i) to learn about various theoretical perspectives on language and communication; and (ii) to learn about various moral issues that pertain to speech. These goals are interrelated. We will learn linguistic theory in order to illuminate practical moral issues, and we will use these practical moral issues to illustrate, and demonstrate the importance of, linguistic theory. With respect to (i), we will cover speech act theory, Gricean pragmatics, presupposition, truth conditional meaning and grammatical gender. With respect to (ii), topics will include lies and bullshit, silencing and pornography, slurring and stereotyping, and gendered pronouns.

This course will provide a safe and welcoming environment to discuss sensitive topics. Some of the readings will, undoubtedly, not align with everyone's views, but we will work through all of them with respect for the topics and each other.

Readings: Students should complete the readings before class. All of the readings are available online through bCourses.

Assignments and grading: 1/3 first paper; 1/3 second paper; 1/3 final exam¹

Attendance: It is mandatory to attend both lectures and sections. Part of attending is being on time to class.

Electronic use: The use of electronics is not permitted in this course. This is because a number of studies suggest that laptop use during lectures is detrimental to learning, both to the user and to surrounding students (see e.g. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/for-better-learning-in-college-lectures-lay-down-the-laptop-and-pick-up-a-pen/>)

Eating: No eating. Drinking OK.

Disabilities: If anyone has a disability that requires special accommodation, please discuss this with me (=Elek) as soon as possible, and we can figure out the best way to accommodate.

Plagiarism: Always use your own words. If you have any questions about what counts as plagiarism, such as which things must be cited and how, please ask. For the student, committing plagiarism means failing the course. For me, it means a lot of paperwork. We have a shared interest in avoiding these outcomes, so let's work together!

¹The final will be based on the in-class writing questions. So, hang onto those and use them as your study guide.

Sexual violence and harassment: There will be no tolerance for sexual violence or harassment in this classroom; harmful behavior will result in removal from the class and possibly the university. If you or someone you know experiences sexual violence or harassment, there are options, rights, and resources, including assistance with academics, reporting, and medical care. Visit survivorsupport.berkeley.edu or call the 24/7 care line at 510-643-2005.

The baseline: The baseline expectation is that students follow course policies (detailed above) and actively participate in lecture and section. If a student falls below the baseline, their grade will be lowered at the discretion of the instructors.

Class schedule

Week 1—Gricean pragmatics and lying

Monday—Grice, “Logic and Conversation”
Tuesday—Adler, “Lying, Deceiving, or Falsely Implicating”
Wednesday—Faulkner, “What Is Wrong with Lying?”
Thursday—Frankfurt, “On Bullshit”
Friday—*Discussion section*

Week 2—Speech acts and pornography

Monday—Austin, “How to Do Things with Words” (selections)
Tuesday—Ginet, “Performativity”
Wednesday—Langton, “Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts”
Thursday—Hornsby and Langton, “Free Speech and Illocution”
Friday—*Discussion section*

Week 3—Generics and stereotypes

Monday—Leslie, “Generics: Cognition and Acquisition”
Tuesday—Haslanger, “Ideology, Generics, and Common Ground”
Wednesday—Bosse, “Stereotyping and Generics”
Thursday—Atkins, “Black Lives Matter or All Lives Matter? Color-Blindness and Epistemic Injustice”
Friday—*Discussion section*

Paper 1 due Saturday

Week 4—Meaning, truth and slurs

Monday—Bach, “Loaded Words: On the Semantics and Pragmatics of Slurs”
Tuesday—Camp, “A Dual Act Analysis of Slurs”
Wednesday—Lepore and Anderson, “What Did You Call Me? Slurs as Prohibited Words”
Thursday—Anderson, “Calling, Addressing, and Appropriation”
Friday—*Discussion section*

Week 5—Grammatical gender and human gender

Monday—Glanzberg and Kirk-Gianini, “Pronouns and Gender”
Tuesday—Hernandez and Crowley, “How to Do Things with Gendered Words”
Wednesday—Kukla and Lance, “Telling Gender: The Pragmatics and Ethics of Gender Ascriptions”
Thursday—Dembroff and Wodak, “He/She/They/Ze”
Friday—*Discussion section*

Paper 2 due Saturday

Week 6—Very good one-offs, if time permits

Monday—Camp, “Why Metaphors Make Good Insults”
Tuesday—Nowak, “Language Loss and Illocutionary Silencing”
Wednesday—Appiah, “The Case for Capitalizing the B in Black”
Thursday—Herbert and Kukla, “Ingrouping, Outgrouping, and the Pragmatics of Peripheral Speech”
Friday—*Final exam*