

Context and Community
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Bob Stalnaker Celebration
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Does everyone have a handout?

Antonio Gramsci on ideology

From *The Prison Notebooks* (1929–1935)

“It is essential to destroy the widespread prejudice that philosophy is a strange and difficult thing just because it is the specific intellectual activity of a particular category of specialists or of professional and systematic philosophers. It must first be shown that all men are ‘philosophers’, by defining the limits and characteristics of the ‘spontaneous philosophy’ which is proper to everybody. This philosophy is contained in: 1. language itself, which is a totality of determined notions and concepts and not just of words grammatically devoid of content; 2. ‘common sense’ and ‘good sense’, 3. popular religion and, therefore, also in the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting, which are collectively bundled together under the name of ‘folklore’” (324–325).

Bob Stalnaker on shared information

From “Common Ground” (2002)

“One thing, according to Grice, that is distinctive about speaker meaning, as contrasted with other ways of getting people to believe something, is a kind of openness or transparency of the action: when speakers mean things, they act with the expectation that their intentions to communicate are mutually recognized. This idea leads naturally to a notion of common ground the mutually recognized shared information in a situation in which an act of trying to communicate takes place.” (704)

Bob Stalnaker on shared information

From “Common Ground” (2002)

“In the simple picture, the common ground is just common or mutual belief, and what a speaker presupposes is what she believes to be common or mutual belief. The common beliefs of the parties to a conversation are the beliefs they share, and that they recognize that they share: a proposition ϕ is common belief of a group of believers if and only if all in the group believe that ϕ , all believe that all believe it, all believe that all believe that all believe it, etc.” (704)

Bob Stalnaker on shared information

From *Context* (2014)

“In the idealized model, we assume that the basic attitude in terms of which common ground and speaker presupposition are defined . . . is a *transparent* attitude, conforming to the principles of positive and negative introspection. . . . This is of course an idealization, but even in the idealization, it does not imply that [a conversational participant] can reflect on or articulate that she does or does not accept what she accepts. Higher order attitudes can be tacit and inarticulate, just as easily as ground level attitudes can be” (232).

Jason Stanley

From *How Propaganda Works* (2015)

“Propaganda characteristically involves attaching problematic social meanings to seemingly innocuous words that are used to describe policy, in effect making the word ‘welfare’ like the word ‘prostitution.’ The social meanings of these words are not-at-issue content. Because they are not-at-issue contents, they are ‘not negotiable, not directly challengeable, and are added [to the common ground] even if the at-issue proposition is rejected’ ” (157–158).

Jason Stanley

From *How Propaganda Works* (2015)

“Bernanke’s goal in using the phrase ‘fiscal cliff’ was laudable: to move public opinion to avoid a devastating loss of jobs. But in so doing, he relied on false ideological beliefs about the economy, rather than lucid explanation. Bernanke thus set the stage for the subsequent irrational public deliberation. . . .” (86).

Catharine MacKinnon

From *Only Words* (1993)

“...there is a relation ... between the use of the epithet ‘nigger’ and the fact that a disproportionate number of children who go to bed hungry every night in the country are African-American; [and between] the use of the word ‘cunt’ and the fact that most prostitutes are women” (74).

Mikhail Bakhtin, from “Discourse in the Novel” (1934–1935)

“When we seek to understand a word, what matters is . . . the actual and always self-interested *use* to which . . . meaning is put and the way it is expressed by the speaker, a use determined by the speaker’s position (profession, social class, etc.) and by the concrete situation. *Who* speaks and under what conditions he speaks: this is what determines the word’s actual meaning.” (p. 401)

John Ehrlichman

From an interview with Dan Baum (1992)

“The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I’m saying? We knew we couldn’t make it illegal to be either against the war or black. But by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.”

Ishani Maitra

From “Subordinating Speech” (2012)

“An Arab woman is on a subway car crowded with people. An older white man walks up to her, and says ‘F***in’ terrorist, go home. We don’t need your kind here.’ He continues speaking in this manner to the woman, who doesn’t respond. He speaks loudly enough that everyone else in the subway car hears his words clearly. All other conversations cease. Many of the passengers turn to look at the speaker, but no one interferes” (101).

Hannah Arendt

From *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951)

“... [The Nazis] always admitted [their political crimes] publicly, never apologized for ‘excesses of the lower ranks’—such apologies were used only by Nazi sympathizers—and impressed the population as being very different from the ‘idle talkers’ of other parties” (344).

My proposal

There is ethical pressure to create shared information that clarifies the force of language. Think of Bob's shared information picture not just descriptively, or instrumentally, but also *prescriptively*.

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There is ethical pressure to create shared information that clarifies the force of language. Think of Bob's shared information picture not just descriptively, or instrumentally, but also *prescriptively*.

Such pressure provides prima facie reasons to make the connections between language and ideology explicit, part of shared information; to make the content conveyed by 'dog whistle' speech explicit; to make it safe and safe feeling for people to speak up in situations where they might otherwise feel safest remaining silent.

Chantal Mouffe

From *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (2013)

“... I start by acknowledging, with Schmitt, the antagonistic dimension of the political, i.e., the permanence of conflicts which cannot have a rational solution. ... [T]his antagonistic conflict can take different forms. It can express itself in the form of what we can call antagonism proper—that is, in the Schmittian form of friend and enemy. ... But it can also be expressed in a different way, which I have called ‘agonism’. The difference is that in the case of agonism we are not faced with a friend/enemy relation but with one between adversaries who recognize the legitimacy of the demands of their opponent” (138).

