

PHILOSOPHY 446: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE  
WINTER 2017

Professor Eric Swanson

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Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:30–11:30, and by appointment.

In what ways do uses of language harm people, and how? How does language affect our thought about society and politics? And how does language affect our ability to communicate, understand each other, and reach consensus when we discuss potentially divisive social and political issues?

In this course we will investigate possible answers to these questions. We will discuss many concrete examples in which uses of language harm people, and in which language affects thought and discourse. For example, we will discuss slurs, hate speech, sexist and racist essentializing language, ‘dogwhistles,’ metaphors, obfuscatory language in politics, and propaganda. These examples will help us develop and evaluate general, abstract theories and ways of thinking about socially and politically important language. We can thereby work toward better appreciating and understanding the force of language when we encounter it in other settings.

#### GRADING

10%: 1-1.5 page weekly responses, due *every* Sunday night: exposition and criticism or extension of an aspect of the *upcoming* reading. Graded pass (you did the reading and thought about it)/fail (you didn’t).

15%: draft of paper 1 (about five pages), due February 5

10%: written feedback on the paper 1 drafts of two peers, due February 12

15%: revision of paper 1 (about six pages), due February 24

15%: draft of paper 2 (about five pages), due April 9

10%: written feedback on the paper 2 drafts of two peers, due April 16

15%: revision of paper 2 (about six pages), due April 25

10%: participation in class

#### EXPECTATIONS

Keep up with the readings. They demand close attention and careful thought, and we’ll often look back to readings from earlier in the semester. If you fall behind you’ll miss much of what’s going on.

We’ll be discussing many controversial issues in this course, and challenging our beliefs throughout. Please strive to be respectful, generous, and considerate in discussion.

Read carefully University of Michigan’s policy on academic integrity, available at:

<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity>

I encourage you to discuss the material with your classmates, but all work you turn in must be your own. Cheating or plagiarism will result in a grade of 0 for that assignment and disciplinary action by the University.

If you think you need an accommodation for a disability, please let me know at your earliest convenience. Some aspects of this course may be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. As soon as you make me aware of your needs, we can work with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) to help determine appropriate academic accommodations. SSD (734-763-3000; [ssd.umich.edu](http://ssd.umich.edu)) typically recommends accommodation through a Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA) form. Any information you provide is private and confidential and will be treated as such.

SCHEDULE

Th 1/5	Organizational meeting
	<b>Pragmatics: background</b>
Tu 1/10	Betty J. Birner, "Defining Pragmatics"
Th 1/12	J. L. Austin, excerpts from <i>How to Do Things with Words</i>
Tu 1/17	Nancy Bauer, "What is to Be Done with Austin?"
Th 1/19	H. P. Grice, excerpts from "Logic and Conversation" Herbert Clark and Catherine Marshall, "Reference Diaries"
Tu 1/24	Robert Stalnaker, "Pragmatic Presuppositions"
Th 1/26	<b>No class; I have to be away at a conference</b>
Mo 1/30	<b>Paper brainstorming conferences start, in place of class on 1/26</b>
Tu 1/31	David Lewis, "Scorekeeping in a Language Game"
	<b>Language and harm</b>
Th 2/2	Catharine MacKinnon, "Equality and Speech"
Su 2/5	<b>Draft of paper 1 due</b>
Tu 2/7	Judith Butler, "Burning Acts, Injurious Speech"
Th 2/9	Rae Langton and Caroline West, "Scorekeeping in a Pornographic Language Game"
Su 2/12	<b>Written feedback on the paper 1 drafts of two peers due</b>
Tu 2/14	Mary Kate McGowan, "On 'Whites Only' Signs and Racist Hate Speech"
Th 2/16	Lynne Tirrell, "Genocidal Language Games"
Tu 2/21	Frantz Fanon, "The Black Man and Language"
Th 2/23	Frantz Fanon, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man"
Fr 2/24	<b>Revision of paper 1 due; have a good winter break!</b>
	<b>Effects of language on thought</b>
Tu 3/7	Louis Althusser, "On Ideology"
Th 3/9	Walter Lippmann, "Stereotypes"
Tu 3/14	Lila Gleitman and Anna Papafragou, "New Perspectives on Language and Thought"
Th 3/16	Paul Thibodeau and Lera Boroditsky, "Natural Language Metaphors Covertly Influence Reasoning"
Tu 3/21	Jennifer Saul, "Dogwhistles, Political Manipulation and Philosophy of Language"
Th 3/23	Sarah-Jane Leslie, "The Original Sin of Cognition"
	<b>Effects of language on communication, understanding, and consensus</b>
Tu 3/28	Sally Haslanger, "Ideology, Generics, and Common Ground"
Th 3/30	George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language" Harry Frankfurt, "On Bullshit"
Tu 4/4	Walter Lippmann, "The Making of a Common Will"
Th 4/6	Jason Stanley, "Language as a Mechanism of Control"
Su 4/9	<b>Draft of paper 2 due</b>
Tu 4/11	Miranda Fricker, "Hermeneutical Injustice"
Th 4/13	Rebecca Kukla, "Performative Force, Convention, and Discursive Injustice"
Su 4/16	<b>Written feedback on the paper 2 drafts of two peers due</b>
Tu 4/18	Bruce Baum, "Before the 'Caucasian Race': Antecedents of European Racialism"
Tu 4/25	<b>Revision of paper 2 due</b>