

PHIL 466: Social and Political Philosophy of Language

University of Southern California

Fall 2022

Instructor: Junhyo Lee

Email: junhyole@usc.edu

Class: Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:00 am – 12:15 pm, MHP 102

Office: MHP B7AC

Office Hours: Thursdays 1:30 pm – 3:30 pm, and by appointment

Course Descriptions

In the twentieth century, philosophers of language and linguists mainly focused on the formal analysis of language. The questions they most tackled were abstract and general: “What’s the meaning of a sentence?” “How is the meaning of a sentence determined by the meanings of its constituents?” However, starting in the 2000s, philosophers of language in the analytic tradition started to pay more attention to practical questions like “In what ways do uses of language harm people, and how?” “How does language affect our thought and public discourse?” “How does language potentially undermine our ability to communicate and understand each other?” 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 our thought and discourse. For example, we will discuss how pornography may subordinate and silence women, how slurring terms may dehumanize their target groups, and how generics may encourage sexist and racist essentialist ideas. These examples will help us not only develop general, abstract theories of practical language but also critically evaluate ways of thinking about socially and politically significant language.

Course Objectives

Students will be able to:

- (1) Describe, and explain key concepts and tools in the philosophy of language (for example, “speech act”, “conversational implicature”, “common ground”, “presupposition”).
- (2) Read and comprehend key texts in the philosophy of language and its intersection with social and political philosophy.
- (3) Charitably reconstruct and evaluate philosophical arguments from written texts.
- (4) Use philosophical tools to understand and analyze the real-world effects of language.

Evaluation

Two Short Papers (20% each): You will get two short paper assignments on Weeks 6 and 13 and have two weeks to write the assignments. You will have a range of prompts to choose from. You are also welcome to develop your own paper topic in consultation with me. These papers should be between 1000-1200 words.

Mid-Term Exam (20%): You will have an exam consisting of a short answer section and a long answer section. In the short answer section, you will be asked to explain some of the key concepts

or definitions. In the long answer section, you will be asked to explain a philosophical debate and take a position on the topic. The mid-term exam will be on Week 8.

Final Exam (30%): You will have a final exam consisting of a short answer section and a long answer section. In the short answer section, you will be asked to explain some of the key concepts or definitions. In the long answer section, you will be asked to explain a philosophical debate and take a position on the topic. The final exam will be on Week 15.

Participation (10%): You are expected to attend class and be engaged with classroom discussion. We'll be discussing many controversial issues in this course. Be respectful, charitable, and considerate in discussion.

Readings

All of the readings for this course will be available on the course website. Students are expected to read the assigned materials before the class for which they are assigned. Make sure not to fall behind. Many of the readings will 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.

Course Policies

Absence: If you will miss a class due to religious observance, family emergency, medical emergency, or any other serious situation which makes it difficult for you to go to class, you should let me know in advance.

Late Submission: You should let me know in advance or as soon as possible when an emergency occurs which makes it difficult for you to complete an assignment in time. If you submit late work without an approved extension, you will get a late penalty. The penalty for late papers is one-third of a letter grade for every 24 hours late. For example, if papers are due at 5 pm on Monday and you turn yours in at 6 pm, a paper that would otherwise have received an A0 will receive an A-. If that same paper were turned in on Tuesday at 6 pm, it would receive a B+, and so on.

Communication: You are strongly encouraged to drop in during my office hours. I enjoy discussing philosophy with people, and I don't bite. And in philosophy, questions that seem "silly" or "naïve" are often the deepest and most important questions, so don't be put off asking about anything you're unsure about.

You are also welcome to contact me by email with any course-related question, or to schedule an appointment in case you cannot make it to my office hours. When you email me, please use your USC email account, and put the course number ("PHIL 466") in the subject line. I will reply to emails within 24 hours of receipt on a workday, or the next workday following a weekend or holiday. I cannot guarantee a reply to emails received within the 12 hours before an exam or deadline. Feel free to email me again if you have not received my reply within the said timeline.

Technology: You can use internet-enabled laptops or tablets for course-related purposes like taking notes or looking up terms. Please silence all other electronic devices such as cell phones not to disrupt the class.

Accommodating Disabilities: It is essential for every student to have the same opportunity for success in the classroom, so I look forward to cooperating with any student who is registered with disability services to satisfy all recommended accommodations. In order for me to do so, you need to bring this registration to my attention at the beginning of the semester. If I don't know that you require special accommodations, I cannot arrange for them. If you are not registered with disability services and believe that you may have a legitimate need for some accommodation, you should contact them at <https://dsp.usc.edu/>. A list of common accommodations recommended by DSP is given here: <https://dsp.usc.edu/accommodations/>.

Academic Honesty: Academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated. This means that the consequence of any form of plagiarism or cheating will result in an 'F' for the course, and students will be referred to student judicial affairs for possible further penalties. See <https://sjacs.usc.edu/students/academic-integrity/>. If you have any questions whatsoever about what constitutes plagiarism or academic dishonesty, you should ask me directly in office hours, after class, or by e-mail; this paragraph constitutes your notice that professed ignorance of any kind about the standards for academic honesty is never an excuse, no matter whether it is actual or feigned.

Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading
Unit 1	Pornography as Speech Acts	
Week 1	Overview	
	Tools: Speech Act Theory	Austin. <i>How To Do Things With Words</i> , chapters 8 & 9.
Week 2	Pornography as Speech Acts	Langton. "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts"
Week 3	Tools: Common Ground	Stalnaker. "Pragmatic Presuppositions"
	Tools: Discourse	Lewis. "Scorekeeping in a Language Game"
Week 4	Pornographic Discourse	Langton & West. "Scorekeeping in a Pornographic Language Game"
Week 5	Pornographic Authority	McGowan. "Conversational Exercitives and the Force of Pornography"

Unit 2 Dehumanizing Slurs		
Week 6	Tools: Formal Semantics Tools: Conversational Implicature	Heim & Kratzer. <i>Semantics in Generative Grammar</i> , chapters. 1 & 2. Grice, "Logic and Conversation"
Week 7	Descriptivism Essentialism	Hom. "The Semantics of Racial Epithets" Neufeld. "An Essentialist Theory of the Meaning of Slurs"
Week 8	Review	
Midterm Exam		
Week 9	Tools: Conventional Implicature Expressivism	Pott. <i>The Logic of Conventional Implicatures</i> , chapters 1&2 Jeshion. "Expressivism and the Offensiveness of Slurs"
Week 10	Expressivism Pragmatic Approach	Bach. "Loaded Words: On the Semantics and Pragmatics of Slurs" Anderson & LePore. "Slurring Words"
Week 11	Pragmatic Approach Multi-Dimensionalism	Bolinger. "The Pragmatics of Slurs" Camp. "A Dual Act Analysis of Slurs"
Week 12	Tools: Directives Slurs as Directives	Portner. "Imperatives and Modals" Kirk-Giannini. "Slurs are Directives"
Unit 3 Generics and Prejudice		
Week 13	Generics as Default Reasoning Essentialization	Leslie. "Generics: Cognition and Acquisition" Leslie. "The Original Sin of Cognition: Fear, Prejudice, and Generalization."
Week 14	Social Kind Generics Criticism of Leslie and Haslanger	Haslanger. "Ideology, Generics, and Common Ground." Sterken. "Generics, Content, and Cognitive Bias" Saul. "Are Generics Especially Pernicious?" Ritchie. "Should We Use Racial and Gender Generics?"

Week 15 Review

Final Exam