

Language and Responsibility

Course Info: Phil 492, Sec. 02, Fall 2018

Location: College Hall 424

Days/Time: Tues & Thurs 10:50-12:05

Instructor: Charles Lassiter **Office:** Campion 205

Office hours: Thursday 12:15-2:15, Friday 8:00-9:00 & 1:00-2:00 and by appt

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“...doing philosophy ought to be *fun*.” — Paul Grice, “Reply to Richards” in *Philosophical Grounds of Rationality*

“Philosophy is thinking really hard about the most important questions and trying to bring analytic clarity to both the questions and the answers.” — Marilyn McCord Adams, *Philosophy Bites*

“If a lion could speak, we could not understand him.” — Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

Course Description

This class is a cross between philosophy of language and moral philosophy. We'll be considering the *action* of communicating and looking at it in terms of *responsibility*. More specifically, we'll be learning about speech act theory and different theories of moral responsibility. After this, we'll focus on two issues: propaganda and hate speech.

Learning Outcomes

Here are the course learning outcomes:

1. integrate the principles of a Jesuit education, prior components of the Core, and their disciplinary expertise (knowledge).
2. clearly and persuasively communicate with an audience of diverse educational backgrounds, personal experiences, and value commitments using ideas and arguments based on evidence, logic, and critical thinking (skill).
3. assess the ways in which the Core has transformed the commitments and perspectives that will inform their future endeavors (attitude).

Course Texts

1. J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd edition
2. Matthew Talbert, *Moral Responsibility: An Introduction*

3. Jason Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*
4. Jeremy Waldron, *The Harm of Hate Speech*

These books are available in the bookstore. Please get them. Other materials will be made available on Blackboard.

Course Work

1. **Assignment:** Class discussions. Students are responsible for leading discussion during class. Students will be broken up into groups of 3-4. The designated group for the meeting is responsible for coming up with 3-4 questions for discussion. The group will then post their questions to Blackboard by *noon* the day before. The rest of the class must then submit a 2-3 sentence response *based in the text* (e.g. citing page numbers, quoting the author) by *10 am* before class. These questions and responses will then be used to drive class discussion.

In short: Group X posts 3-4 questions by *noon* on Monday/Wednesday. The rest of the class answers by *10 am* on Tuesday/Thursday.

Purpose: I have MANY OPINIONS about what is important when it comes to language and responsibility. But what's more important to me than you learning my genius insights is for you to come up with your own genius insights. Hence, you all will be driving conversation and I'll chime in towards the end of the period. This is worth 30% of your final grade. *Outcome 2.*

2. **Assignment:** Learning to use [COCA \(and other corpora\)](#). Words are funny ol' things. What I mean by something may not be what you understand by it. One way to get clearer on this is to look at how people use expressions. Of course, it's not enough to consult one or two people. You need to consult a whole bunch. That's where online corpora come in. These are massive, searchable text databases. We'll be using [one maintained by BYU](#). This gives us a bird's eye view of how people are using expressions.

To get a handle on this, we'll begin by having you explain some key concepts in your field. Think about your future career, what it is that you hope to do. That's likely going to involve some rather technical concepts. For this paper, you're going to look at *three* of these technical concepts. You'll use BYU's COCA corpora to help figure out how these terms and expressions are used outside your field. So for example, if you hope to be a therapist, you can look at how 'depression' (and its various cognates) are used and compare them to the technical usage. If you're in finance, you can look at technical and ordinary uses of 'dividend' or 'liquidity.' Finally, you'll then consider how you would correct misconceptions about this concept when explaining it to someone way outside your field. *Note:* it may be that there is *no*

ordinary usage of a term outside your field. That's fine. But you'll need to reflect on what that means for laypersons. How would you explain a concept whose only life is inside your area of expertise?

Purpose: In your professional life, you will have to explain technical or difficult to understand concepts to lay people. One way to help a lay person understand what a technical term means is to consider its ordinary usage, i.e. ways in which the term is ordinarily understood. For example, philosophers run into this frequently. What a philosopher means by 'believe' or 'rational' isn't always what is ordinarily meant. So if you ever have to give a presentation to people outside your field, learning how to use COCA can help avoid some pitfalls. This is worth 20% of your final grade *Outcomes 1 & 2*

3. **Assignment:** Analysis of hate speech/propaganda. You will find an example of hate speech or propaganda. Using the theoretical apparatuses we've developed in the class, you'll do all of the following in an eloquent and insightful paper (but not necessarily in this order; figure out the best structure for your paper on your own):
 - a. Argue for why the example is an example of hate speech/propaganda (i.e. if someone says "that's not hate speech" you can respond, "actually, it is and here's why...")
 - b. Identify what the expression is *doing* (i.e. provide an understanding using speech act theory). This will require some research into the context of utterance.
 - c. Examine the key words/phrases in Google Trends and the BYU corpora (and other databases if you like)
 - d. Assess responsibility/praiseworthiness/blameworthiness of person(s) propagating the propaganda/hate speech.
 - e. Reflect on how you arrived at the conclusions stated in (a), (b), and (d).

In addition to writing the paper, you'll give a 5-7 minute presentation to the class describing your findings. More details on this to come...

Purpose: The main focus of this class is thinking about how we talk and hold people responsible. This culminating project is an opportunity for you to think through a concrete instance of hate speech/propaganda. The 'responsibility' piece is that folks often don't realize they're propagating hate speech as they're doing it (or at least plausibly don't realize this). So what do we do when someone is repeating tired, racist expressions like "doing something about black on black crime" and not thinking about the wider cultural and social consequences of such utterances? This is worth 30% of your final grade *Outcome 3*.

4. **Assignment:** Journal entries. Four times throughout the semester, you will think about responsibility/allowability of hate speech and propaganda. Each entry will be about 500 words long and will be an opportunity to check in with yourself with where you are in thinking about responsibility and hate speech/propaganda.

Purpose: The goal here is to reflect on what you think about these issues. Propaganda and hate speech have been with us for a very, very long time. Our robust speech rights as Americans ensures (for the most part) that these forms of speech are allowable. An important question for us is: do we want them to be morally, socially, legally allowable? These are worth 20% of your final grade. *Outcome 3.*

One more thing: if you're reading this, post your favorite pun on my office door this. This will count as your participation grade for Thursday 8/30.

Grading Scale

Numerical Value	Letter/GPA point value	Rough idea of what the grade means
94-100	A/4.0	Outstanding. Student goes above and beyond what is required. (E.g. offers an insight/analysis that appears elsewhere in the philosophical literature; does extensive research for papers/presentations.) Concepts elucidated clearly and with novel examples.
90-93	A-/3.7	
86-89	B+/3.3	Very good. Student does more high-quality research than is required for the assignment.
82-85	B/3.0	
78-81	B-/2.7	Average. Doing what is assigned. Note that following the instructions will put you in the orbit of this grade.
74-77	C+/2.3	
70-73	C/2.0	
65-69	C-/1.7	Below average. Doing less than what is assigned. Missing some component(s) of an assignment.

60-64	D/1.0	
<60	F/0.0	Plagiarism. Failure to show anything learned.

Attendance

Students are allowed to miss **twice** the number of weekly meetings. If you exceed the number of absences permitted, you will receive a grade of “V”, which has the effect of an “F” and is calculated as such into the GPA. Exceptions include: documented illness (undocumented illness isn’t exempted), religious holidays, military commitments, travelling for sports events (or comparable extracurricular activity, e.g. debate team).

Also, if a student is so tired that they need to put their head on their desk, then that student will be asked to leave and take a nap. It will count as a missed meeting, however.

Late Work

Papers are penalized by **one letter grade for each class it is late**. If students know ahead of time that they will have some difficulty meeting a deadline, please contact me. I'll be more than happy to take other commitments you might have into consideration when assigning due dates.

Technology in Class

I will allow laptops/tablets in this class since much of the discussion preparation will take place on Blackboard. However, I will not hesitate to call out students who seem to be doing something other than focusing on class discussion: looking at your screen and giggling during a discussion of hate speech is a good indicator your mind is elsewhere. I do this because we have 75 minutes twice a week to think carefully about complex issues. This is time we get to set aside to do this. You likely won’t have this luxury of time in the future when you’ve got a job, relationship issues, student loans, rent, health insurance premiums, and attempting to cultivate a social life.

Please note that if I see a student using their machine in class for something other than coursework, I will ask that student to gather their things and leave. It is highly disrespectful to everyone in the class to be otherwise occupied while we’re creating a learning environment.

Plagiarism and Cheating

Plagiarism, or taking someone else’s work without giving credit to the original author, can and must be avoided at all costs. It violates the integrity of scholarship and academic honesty. It is certainly fine to build on or explain the work of others, and in fact, such communal work is necessary to expand our knowledge. But, to claim the other’s work as your own is dishonest, and honesty is essential to the life of a student.

Plagiarism and cheating are not tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, and theft. Any student found guilty of academic dishonesty is subject to disciplinary action, which may include, but is not limited to, (1) a failing grade for the test or assignment in question, (2) a failing grade for the course, or (3) a recommendation for dismissal from the University. If you have any questions about what does or does not count as plagiarism or

cheating, please feel free to ask me. (See also the [student handbook](#) for further information.)

Statement Concerning Sexual Misconduct

Gonzaga University recognizes the inherent dignity of all individuals and promotes respect for all people. Sexual misconduct is not tolerated at Gonzaga. This includes unwanted physical/sexual contact, sexual assault, and unwanted and harassing sexual comments. (Clearly, this list isn't exhaustive.) If you have been the victim of sexual misconduct, I want you to know that I am a first point of contact for getting you in touch with mental health services, campus police, and (if you should choose to pursue legal action) city police. As a faculty member, I am interested in promoting a safe and healthy environment. But you should also know that if you tell me anything that incriminates a student, I am legally bound to report that information. The technical terminology here is that I (and all other faculty and administrators) am a *mandatory reporter*. This rule might seem a little draconian, but it prevents faculty and administrators from being passive bystanders: if you tell me something, I'm breaking the law if I don't tell the relevant people, e.g. Gonzaga University's title IX coordinator. But I understand that you might not want to begin going down the road of an investigation. Perhaps you just want to talk with someone about what happened. That's ok. If you would feel more comfortable talking with someone other than me or any other mandatory reporter, here are some phone numbers that will connect you with people to whom you can talk.

- **Gonzaga Health Center** | [509.313.4052](tel:509.313.4052) | 704 E Sharp Avenue
- **Gonzaga Counseling Center** | [509.313.4054](tel:509.313.4054) | 324 E Sharp Avenue
- **Any priest serving as a sacramental confessor or any ordained religious leader serving in the sacred confidence role.** | [509.313.4242](tel:509.313.4242)
- **Lutheran Community Services and SAFeT** | [509.624.7273](tel:509.624.7273)

The people you would talk to at these numbers are either (1) bound to keep the information to themselves (e.g. a priest serving in the role of confessor) or (2) are not affiliated with the university in a such capacity that makes them mandatory reporters (e.g. Lutheran Community Services). But no matter whether you talk to me, another faculty member/administrator, or someone at one of the above numbers, there are lots of people in the Gonzaga community who want — and are able — to help.

If you have questions or concerns or need to file a report, please contact:

Stephanie N. Whaley
Title IX Director
509-313-6910
whaleys@gonzaga.edu
Business Services Building 018

Or by filling out [an online form](#).

Notice to Students with Disabilities or Medical Conditions:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this

legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides reasonable accommodation for their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability/medical condition requiring an accommodation, please call or visit the Disability Access office (room 209 Foley Library, 509-313-4134).

Course Evaluation:

At Gonzaga, we take teaching seriously, and we ask our students to evaluate their courses and instructors so that we can provide the best possible learning experience. In that spirit, we ask students to give us feedback on their classroom experience near the end of the semester. I will ask you to take a few minutes then to carry out course/instructor evaluation online. Please know that I appreciate your participation in this process. This is a vital part of our efforts at Gonzaga to improve continually our teaching, our academic programs, and our entire educational effort.

Expectations:

Here is what you have a right to expect of me:

1. Be on time for class
2. Respond to communications in a timely fashion (usually, within 24 to 36 hours)
3. Return your work with feedback and to explain feedback when needed
4. Return your work in a timely fashion (usually, 7-10 days)
5. Be available for office hours (with exceptions for illness or other unexpected events)
6. Answer your questions to the best of my abilities as a professional philosopher
7. Assess your work in a critical and unbiased manner
8. Listen to and address your concerns.

Here is what I have a right to expect of you:

1. Be on time for class
2. Ask questions when you do not understand
3. Accept that some questions do not have clear answers and be willing to entertain possibilities of answers
4. Submit your assignments in a timely fashion (with exceptions for unexpected events)
5. Come to office hours if you need additional help
6. Use class time effectively: attend to what we're talking about. If you don't understand, ask a question. If you don't see the point of what we're doing, say so.
7. Listen to and address my concerns regarding the class.

Course Schedule

Note: This is a projected reading schedule. We may get a little behind if some concepts require further fleshing out or generate discussion. That's ok. We'll compensate accordingly. On the other hand if students want to move faster, I can *definitely* find more material and will adjust the schedule as needed.

Dates	Topic	Reading	Discussion Leaders	Assignments
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8/28	Intro to phil language, using Google Trends	Google Trends , Google Correlate	n/a	
8/30	using BYU corpus	BYU corpus	n/a but meet in CH 243!	Journal 1
9/4	Austin on speech acts	Lectures 1,2	5	
9/6	Austin on speech acts	Lectures 3-4	6	
9/11	No class		n/a	
9/13	Austin on speech acts	Austin, Lectures 8,9,12	7	COCA paper
9/18	Presupposition, conversation kinematics	“Scorekeeping in a Pornographic Language Game”	1	
9/20	Responsibility: an intro	Talbert, ch. 1 (all)	2	
9/25		“How to Resist Things with Words”	Dr. Elena Cuffari (Worcester State University, philosophy)	
9/27	Some ways to think about responsibility	Talbert, 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.6	3	
10/2	Luck and ultimate responsibility	Talbert, 3.1, 3.2	4	Journal 2
10/4	NO CLASS	LASSITER SICK	SAD TIMES	FOR ALL
10/9	Knowledge and responsibility	Talbert, ch. 5 (all)	5	
10/11	Indigenous approaches to knowledge	“What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us”	6	
10/16	Indigenous approaches to	“Truth and Native American	7	

	knowledge (cont)	Epistemology”		
10/18	Propaganda	Stanley, Introduction	1	
10/23	Propaganda	Stanley, pp. 39-66	2	
10/25	Propaganda	Stanley, pp. 66-80	3	Journal 3
10/29	Propaganda	Stanley, pp. 81-102	4	
11/1	Propaganda	Stanley, pp. 102-124	5	
11/6	Propaganda	Stanley, pp. 125-152	6	
11/8	Propaganda	Stanley, pp. 125-152	6	
11/13	Propaganda	Stanley, pp. 152-177	7	
11/15	Propaganda	Stanley, pp. 178-222	1	
11/20	Hate speech	Waldron, ch. 1 & 2	2 & 3 ¹	
11/22	No class		n/a	
11/27	Hate speech	Waldron, ch. 4	4	Journal 4
11/29	Hate speech	Waldron, ch. 5	5	
12/4	Hate speech	Waldron, ch. 6	6	
12/6		Analysis presentations		Analyses
12/12, 3:30-5:30	Final Exam	Analysis presentations		Analyses

¹ Group 2 will come up with 2 questions on chapter 1 and group 3 will come up with 2 questions on chapter 2.