

Propaganda and Social Exclusion

Professor: Bryce Huebner

Office: 234 New North

Office hours: T 13:00 - 14:30; by appointment

Course meets:

T & Th 15:30 - 16:45 pm

Location: Walsh 394

Propaganda and other forms of politically motivated rhetoric are commonly deployed in political campaigns, public policy campaigns, and other types of social movements, as well as in advertising, news services, and popular culture. We've been seeing a lot of propaganda lately, so I think that you already know this. But this is nothing new, and there's been interesting philosophical work on the topic. Plato was worried about the ways in which political rhetoric and similar forms of speech impact our self-understanding as social and ethical beings; and many subsequent philosophers have been troubled by the effect of systematically distorted forms of communication. But we won't focus on Plato! In this course, we will attempt to pursue these sorts of issues, building on the many things that we have learned more recently about propaganda and social exclusion. First, we will attempt to figure out what propaganda is, and how it differs from other forms of speech. Second, we will ask how and why it works, and we will examine the ways in which it is employed as a mechanism of dehumanization and social exclusion. As we work through the course, we will draw on a host of multidisciplinary perspectives, as much of the relevant work has gone on outside of philosophy (and we will talk about why that is!). So while our primary approach will be philosophical, we will also need to draw on resources from anthropology, cultural psychology, cognitive science, and social theory. No background knowledge of philosophy or these other disciplines is expected or required.

Course Requirements:

10%	Ongoing	This will be a discussion-oriented class, and you will be expected to make consistent contributions to the class discussion. But don't worry. We will also do a lot of small group-work if you're more apprehensive about talking in class.
15%	Ongoing	Over the course of the semester you must take part in one 15-20 minute Group Presentation. A sign-up sheet will be posted early in the semester with the dates and available topics.
You must write four short response papers over the course of the semester. You can write on any issue that we address in the class, or you can address a topic that is more suited to your own interests (if you chose the latter option, you must clear your topic with me before hand).		
15%	2/3	Submit a brief paper (900-1000 words) that is based on the first section of the class.
15%	3/3	Submit a brief paper (900-1000 words) that is based on the second section of the class.
15%	3/31	Submit a brief paper (900-1000 words) that is based on the third section of the class.
15%	4/28	Submit a brief paper (900-1000 words) that is based on the final section of the class.
15%	5/10	At the end of the semester, you must write a brief narrative assessment of what you have learned in the class, as well as what questions you feel have been left unresolved (and why). Details will be provided in due course

Grading Criteria:

Short papers: Papers will receive a 'B+' if they 1) clearly articulate the claim that is being defended, 2) are relatively well organized, 3) rely on fairly strong evidence and arguments, and 4) are stylistically clear—thereby presenting a *competent* argument. 'A' grades will be awarded when papers *excel* in every category, exhibiting a clear capacity for *doing philosophy*—and 'A-' grades will be awarded where papers excel in one of these areas. 'B' grades will be awarded to papers that are weaker in one area—but still satisfactory. 'C' grades will be awarded to papers that are weak in two or more of these categories; and 'D' grades will only be awarded to papers that are weak all categories or that omit one category altogether (e.g., by lacking a thesis or lacking arguments for a thesis).

Group presentations: Group presentations grades will be based on the success of your presentation (evaluated by the class; and evaluated by the professor), and on the group's own report about the contributions of members. Grading rubrics will be circulated when the sign-up sheet is posted.

Paper deadlines: If you need an extension on a paper, please ask *before* the due date. In general, I will be willing to give a 48-hour grace period (no questions asked). If you are still having trouble completing the assignment after that, you must set up an appointment to go over your ideas and set a schedule for finishing the paper. Unless an extension is granted in advance, assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a grade (A- to a B+, B+ to a B, etc.) for each day they are late.

Appealing a grade: You can appeal any grade that you feel does not accurately represent the work you have done. All appeals for re-evaluation must be made in writing, no more than two weeks after your paper is returned, and no sooner than 48 hours after you receive your grade. Requests must provide a compelling argument for raising the grade, but an agreement to re-evaluate a paper is no guarantee of a better grade, and it can result in lower grades if there are more serious problems that were missed on the first reading.

The honor code: The Georgetown University Honor pledge requires you to be honest in your academic endeavors and to hold yourself to the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life. I expect you to be familiar with the letter and the spirit of this pledge; and, I will enforce the Honor Code by reporting any and all suspected cases of academic dishonesty.

Accessibility and diversity: One finds a great deal of diversity in teaching and learning styles in a modern university. These styles may not always mesh in ways that are conducive to the success and wellbeing of everyone in a course. But there are often ways of improving things. I am happy to discuss the structure of this course, and to work with the learning styles people have to the best of my abilities. So please feel free to talk to me in office hours. I sincerely think that every student is entitled to a meaningful and stimulating classroom experience! Disabled students and students on record with the university as requiring particular accommodations, please let me know that this is the case, in confidence, during the first few weeks of the semester—and please take advantage of services provided by the university. Finally, please let me know if you learn during the semester that something would make the classroom accessible.

Sexual misconduct: As a faculty member and an educator, it is my responsibility to help create a safe learning environment on our campus. Georgetown University and its faculty are committed to supporting survivors of sexual misconduct, including relationship violence and sexual assault. And university policy requires all faculty members to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role is to coordinate the University's response to sexual misconduct. But Georgetown also has a number of fully confidential professional resources who can provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct. These resources include: [Jen Schweer](#) (202.687.0323) Associate Director of Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention; [Erica Shirley](#) (202.687.6985) Trauma Specialist (CAPS). More information about campus resources and reporting sexual misconduct can be found at <http://sexualassault.georgetown.edu>.

Mind your manners: Philosophy is best done collectively and collaboratively; however, some of the questions we will be discussing in this class are likely to generate contentious claims, spirited discussions, vehement disagreements, and trenchant criticisms. This is at least part of what doing philosophy is all about. In discussing, disagreeing, criticizing, and arguing with one another, we must make an effort to remain courteous and respectful. I promise to do my best to raise philosophical issues and to start philosophical discussions in ways that are as sensitive as possible to the variety of viewpoints and opinions that we are sure to find among the members of this class. But I will only be able to do this if each of you helps to create an atmosphere where we can develop ideas in a friendly and welcoming environment where we all learn from one another. Perhaps more importantly, if you want to disagree with someone, or if you want to offer a criticism of their viewpoint, be sure to offer reasons for the approach that you are suggesting. If we reason through things together, we are sure to have a great semester!

Tentative reading schedule

(** Recommended but optional readings)

1/12	Introduction: No reading
Section 1: How language functions as ideology and propaganda	
1/17 1/19	Jennifer Saul , "Dogwhistles, Political Manipulation and the Philosophy of Language" Scott Alexander "You are still crying wolf" ** Jason Stanley "Beyond Lying"; ** Emily Badger , "Actually, many inner cities are doing great"; ** David Cohen , "Trump's Assassination Dog Whistle..."
1/24 1/26	Elizabeth Camp , "Slurring perspectives" (focus on §§1, 3.1, 3.2, & 4); The Daily Show , " Catching racism " (8 min); ** Kenneth Himma , "On the Definition of Unconscionable Racial and Sexual Slurs"
1/31 2/2	Lynne Tirrell , "Genocidal language games"; ** Rachel Cohen-Rottenberg , "Why ableist language matters"; ** Katherine Rendon , "Ableist, Homophobic, & Racist Words"
Section 2: How everyday speech shapes social space	
2/7 2/9	Greg Lukianoff & Jon Haidt , "The Coddling of the American mind"; Angela Davis , "Afro Images: Politics, fashion, and nostalgia"; ** Aviva Chomsky , "Will the millennial movement rebuild the ivory tower or be crushed by it?"
2/14 2/16	Michel Foucault , <i>The History of Sexuality vol1</i> (excerpt); ** Cassie Herbert & Rebecca Kukla , "Ingrouping, Outgrouping, and the pragmatics of peripheral speech"
2/21 2/23	Luvell Anderson , "Racist Humor"; Lindy West , " How to make a rape joke "; ** Lindy West , <i>Shrill</i> , Chs 12-14
2/28 3/2	Tommy Shelby , "Impure Dissent" Brandon Hogan (guest lecture)
Section 3: Structures of Inclusion and exclusion	
3/14 3/16	Sally Haslanger , "Racism, ideology, & Social Movements"; ** Todd Kliman , "Coding and decoding dinner"

3/21 3/23	Derrick Bell , “Brown v Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma”; Irami Osei-Frimpong , “ Do black lives matter? ” (15 min); ** Myisha Cherry , “State Racism, State Violence, & Vulnerable Solidarity”
3/28 3/30	Robin di Angelo , “White fragility”; Arlie Russell Hochschild , “The American right: Its deep story”; ** Anna Kegler , “ The Sugarcoated Language Of White Fragility ”; ** Carol Anderson , “Ferguson isn’t about black rage against cops”
Section 4: The psychology behind ideology and propaganda	
4/4 4/6	John Jost & David Amodio , “Political ideology as motivated social cognition”; Maureen Craig & Jennifer Richerson , “On the Precipice of a ‘Majority-Minority’ America”
4/11	Linda Skitka et al , “Utopian Hopes or Dystopian Fears?”
4/18 4/20	Shai Davidai & Thomas Gilovich , “Building a more mobile America”; Michael Kraus & Jacinth Tan , “Americans overestimate social class mobility”
4/25 4/27	Frances Fox Pivens & Richard Cloward , “Poor People’s Movements and the Structuring of Protest”; ** Subcomandante Marcos , “Dignity cannot be studied”; ** Staughton Lynd , “Overcoming racism”