

# PHIL 423: LANGUAGE AND POLITICS IN ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY

Spring 2022

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<b>Instructor:</b> Megan Hyska	<b>Time:</b> Tuesday 2-5
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**Office Hours:** Kresge 3-349, Thursdays 11-1 and by appointment.

**Course Materials:** All materials will be made available on Canvas.

**Course Description:** It is sometimes alleged that claims about language— about particular words or constructions, about speech act-types, or about the nature of linguistic meaning itself— have political consequences. This course is an inquiry into the various connections between the linguistic and the political that have appeared in the analytic tradition. While the so-called social/political turn in analytic philosophy of language is a phenomenon of recent decades, the readings in this course raise the question of whether the linguistic theses that preoccupied earlier 20th century analytic philosophers can also be read as connected to political projects, whether or not their authors intended as much. In the first four weeks of the quarter, we will examine alleged political entailments of several important 20th century metasemantic positions: verificationism, the meaning-as-use theory, Davidsonian anti-representationalism, and semantic externalism. In the subsequent three weeks, we will examine a number of projects that contemporary philosophers of language, explicitly conceiving of themselves as doing social/political work, are preoccupied by. And in the final week or two of seminar we'll take up critical questions about the utility of analytic philosophy of language for doing political work, and the helpfulness of various attempts to demarcate this sort of philosophy of language as its own field within the discipline. This seminar is designed both to encourage original thinking about the different sorts of political interventions that analytic philosophers of language have made (or have tried to make), and to invite critical appraisal of this tradition's blindspots, shortcomings, and unexplored potentials.

NB: this class is designed as a second course in social philosophy of language, as most graduate students have already have been exposed to seminal contemporary works on e.g. pornography, illocutionary harm, and testimonial injustice in a prior course.

## Course Outline:

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Class #	READINGS
Day 1, 04.05	Introduction, No readings
Day 2, 04.12	<b>Socialism and Verificationism</b>  Carnap, <i>The Elimination of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language</i>  Hahn, Neurath, & Carnap, <i>The Scientific Conception of the World: The Vienna Circle</i>  Cohen, excerpt from <i>Dialectical Materialism and Carnap's Logical Empiricism</i>
Day 3, 04.19	<b>Late Wittgenstein and political contestation</b>

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Wittgenstein, §1-43 and 217-242 from *Philosophical Investigations*

Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism*

Scheman, *Mapping the Rough Ground*

Crary, *Wittgenstein's Philosophy in Relation to Political Thought*

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Day 4, 04.26      **Davidson and Political Progress**

Davidson, *On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme*

Davidson, *What Metaphors Mean*

Rorty, excerpt from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*

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Day 5, 05.03      **Semantic externalism, expertise, and political disagreement**

Burge, *Individualism and the Mental*

Anderson, excerpt from *Metasemantics and Intersectionality in the Misinformation Age: Truth in Political Struggle*

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Day 6, 05.10      **Conceptual engineering and political amelioration**

Haslanger, *Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?*

Cappelen, excerpt from *Fixing Language: an Essay on Conceptual Engineering*

Cull, *Engineering is not a luxury: Black feminists and logical positivists on conceptual engineering*

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Day 7, 05.17      **Levels of analysis in social/political semantics/pragmatics: words, illocutions, discourses**

Ritchie, *Essentializing Language and the Prospects for Ameliorative Projects*

Michaelson, Pepp & Sterken, *On Retweeting*

Hesni, *Social Scripts and Social Change*

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Day 8, 05.24      **Propaganda**

Stanley, excerpt from *How Propaganda Works*

Srinivasan, *Philosophy and Ideology*

Hyska, *Against Irrationalism in the Theory of Propaganda*

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Day 9, 05.31

**Social/ political philosophy of language as a subdiscipline**

Beaver and Stanley, *Toward a Non-Ideal Philosophy of Language*

Dever and Cappelen, *On the Uselessness of the Distinction between Ideal and Non-Ideal Theory (at least in the Philosophy of Language)*

Mills, *“Ideal Theory” as Ideology*

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**Participation and presentation:** Those taking the class for a grade are required to give a short presentation on one of the required readings in the schedule above. Presentation slots will be finalized by the second week of classes. Beyond your presentation, students are expected to actively participate in discussion every week. Should you find yourself struggling to speak up in class though, I urge you not to retreat into embarrassment about it— come see me, and we can talk about strategies for seminar participation. Lots of people struggle with this now and again, and it is a skill that can absolutely be learned.

**Final Paper:** Those taking the class for a grade will write a seminar paper. This paper should generally be somewhere between 4000 and 7000 words. The final paper will be due on June 6th at 12pm. Students taking the class P/N are exempt from this requirement. Students who are writing a paper are required to submit a “pitch” by 05.11 (more details on this in Canvas), and to peer review a colleague’s pitch by 05.17.

**Students with Disabilities:** Any student with a disability requesting accommodations should register with Services for Students with Disabilities ([ssd@northwestern.edu](mailto:ssd@northwestern.edu); 847-467-5530) and present an accommodation letter from SSD to their professor, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain confidential.