



NORTHWESTERN
UNIVERSITY
IN QATAR

LANGUAGE AND POWER

PHIL 242-71 ▪ Spring 2019

Instructor: Dr. Torsten Menge, Assistant Professor in Residence

Email: torsten.menge@northwestern.edu

Meeting time and location: Sunday/Tuesday, 1:30-3:20 pm, 1-223

Office: 2-330, ☎ 4454 5024

Office Hours: Sunday/Tuesday 4-5 pm, Monday 1:30-3:30 pm, and by appointment

1. Course Description

Language plays a central role in our social lives: it helps us express our feelings, convey our thoughts, and create important connections with others. At the same time, it can be used to disparage, marginalize, or subordinate people. In this course, we will examine how the use of language can draw on, exert, and reinforce social power. With the help of classic ideas from the philosophy of language, we will analyze a number of contemporary issues concerned with the forms and effects of social discourse. Topics may include: free speech; the impact of hate speech, pornography, slurs, and other harmful speech; generalizations (so-called generics); propaganda and ideology; the representation of gender, race, and other social categories in language; the relationship between our social position and the effect of our speech; resistance to harmful speech. As we explore these topics, we will practice reading and critically engaging with analytical and argumentative texts, challenging basic assumptions, analyzing concepts, and assessing arguments.

2. Course Objectives

Through active participation in the course, you will:

- be able to follow and participate in philosophical debates about language and power;
- develop a set of analytic tools that will help you engage with complex questions about role of language and power in public life;
- strengthen your skills in reading and interpreting difficult texts;
- improve your ability to reconstruct arguments and to criticize them, both in writing and in discussion with others.

3. Required Texts

Vaughn, Lewis (2018). *Writing Philosophy: A Student's Guide to Reading and Writing Philosophy Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Please pick up this book in the bookstore).

All other readings for the course will be available through Canvas/Perusall.

4. Class Format & Expectations

Classes will consist of lectures and class discussions, with a strong emphasis on discussion. I encourage you to participate actively in class. I want you to learn how to *do* philosophy, by reflecting on your own views and critically engaging with the views and arguments of others, rather than simply learning about what famous philosophers have said. Active participation will help you better understand the readings and topics we discuss. It will also help you with the writing assignments and improve your argumentation skills.

Please do the readings before you come to class so that you can make contributions to the discussion. Many of the readings are difficult and dense, so reserve time (a minimum of 2 hours per meeting) for concentrated reading. Take notes to keep track of the views and arguments and write down your questions and comments.

I am happy to accommodate, to the best of my abilities, a multitude of different learning styles that people have. Please come talk to me about the structure of the course and the assignments in office hours.

5. Office Hours and Communication

I am available in office hours to answer questions, to review class material and assignments, and to discuss any other concerns. I'm always excited to talk with students about philosophy, so please do not hesitate to come by. If you cannot make my office hours, please email me to set up an appointment. If you are having difficulties in the class, please communicate with me early so I can help you succeed.

I usually reply to emails within 24 hours (48 hours over the weekend). Please check your email and Canvas regularly for announcements and updates to the schedule.

6. Assessment

Critical Reading and Online Annotations (15%)

The primary readings for this class will be posted on *Perusall*. This online annotation tool will help you read critically and engage with your classmates. For the annotation assignment, you will post, per reading, at least 3 original annotations and 2 responses to comments or questions made by other students. To receive credit, annotations should be posted **by midnight the night before the reading is assigned** (see up-to-date schedule on Canvas). You should annotate a **total of 10 texts** throughout the semester. If you annotate more than 10 readings, I will drop the lowest grades. We will talk about how to actively read philosophical texts and how to engage productively with them throughout the semester.

Participation (15%):

Active participation in class is critical for your learning. You should come to class prepared to be actively involved. You can contribute by asking and answering questions about the reading, sharing personal reflections that relate to the readings, or engaging with the contributions of other classmates. Questions are a great way to advance your own learning and that of your classmates (as they are likely to have similar questions). Please do not think that you need to have understood everything in order to contribute. In fact, explaining what you don't understand or why you are confused about something is a great starting point for learning.

- ★ In addition to regular participation in discussion, I will also take into account your participation in other class activities, such as debates and short writing exercises.
- ★ I allow two absences without question; I recommend that you save these absences for when you are sick or need to be away from campus. **For each additional absence, you will lose one percentage point of your final grade.** Absences beyond two will be excused only on the basis of medical documentation. Documentation should be submitted to Patti Collins, phone: 4454-5073, email: patricia.collins@northwestern.edu.
- ★ Out of respect to your classmates and me, please come to class on time. Repeated lateness or lengthy absences during class will affect your grade.

Entry in Glossary (10%)

We will together compile a glossary of key concepts over the course of the semester. We will use Canvas to work on and access the glossary. You will write *two entries* in the glossary. Each entry should be 300 to 500 words. Based primarily on the readings, it should (i) explain the concept or issue as clearly as possible, with an attempt to avoid unexplained jargon, (ii) provide example(s) and/or illustration. Your entry should be written in the style of a concise lexicon entry. You will sign up for your entries in class. The deadline for the entry is one week after we discussed the concept in class.

Papers (30%)

You will write two short essays (about 5-6 pp. in length). Each paper requires a draft to be completed ahead of time so that you can have your draft reviewed, either by me, by your peers, or by the writing center specialists (or a combination of those). Failure to submit a complete draft by the time indicated on the schedule will earn you an automatic F for your (final) paper—I want you to develop a habit of not turning in your first draft.

I will evaluate your papers based on clarity in writing, the support you offer for your claims, critical engagement with the positions and arguments of others, and originality of thought. Detailed essay assignments will be distributed in class. Due dates are provided in the schedule below (please note that the dates are subject to change).

Exam (15 %)

There will be one in-class exam. The exam serves to assess your comprehension of the main concepts and arguments covered in the readings and in class. All readings, lectures, and other supplemental materials up to the point of the exam are relevant for the exam.

Final Project (15%):

For your final project, you develop a short podcast in which you will discuss one of the issues we covered in class in a way that is accessible to the general public. You will be working in small groups to prepare and produce the podcast. I will discuss the details of the assignment in class. You will be required to submit two (2) preparatory documents in advance – a short discussion of the issue that you would like to cover, and a script/outline of the podcast. Please see the schedule for due dates. The podcast itself will be due during exam week.

Grading Policies

The grading scale for this class is as follows:

	87-89 = B+	77-79 = C+	60-69 = D
94-100 = A	84-86 = B	74-76 = C	
90-93= A-	80-83= B-	70-73 = C-	59 and lower = F

Please note that A grades are only awarded for truly outstanding performance. Such a grade is the highest possible indication of a student's excellence in scholarship and writing. In other words, an A grade goes above and beyond correctly answering the question or completing the assignment. The following overview from Northwestern's History Department provides a helpful account of the general grading standards that I follow:

<https://www.history.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/major-minor/grading-guidelines.html>

- **Late Policy:** Late assignments will receive an automatic reduction of one full letter grade, except in the case of a documentable emergency or by prior arrangement. I readily grant extensions if you speak with me in advance. For non-emergency extensions, you should speak to me at least 48 hours in advance. I will not usually accept assignments that are more than one week late. There will be no extensions for reading annotations.
- **Grade Contestation:** If you believe the work you submitted deserves a different grade than it received, you may ask in writing for reconsideration. Your request must be submitted within one week, but no sooner than two days after the assignment is returned. Your written request must explain why you believe the work deserves a different grade.

7. Further Policies and Expectations

Classroom Conduct: Faculty and students have a responsibility to maintain an appropriate and respectful learning environment together. Respect, courtesy, and sensitivity are important, especially when we are dealing with differences of culture, religion, politics, socioeconomic status, race, sexual orientation, gender, and nationality.

Respectful Discussion: Respect your classmates by listening to what they have to say, and make an effort to respond to points raised by others. Please be conscious of the balance of contributions in class—if you have spoken a lot, make an effort to cede the floor to less vocal classmates who might be waiting to enter the conversation. Be mindful of how the topics under discussion may impact other students in the class. If you want to disagree with someone and want to offer a criticism of their viewpoint, be sure to offer reasons for your criticism.

Laptop and Cellphone Policy: Phones must be silenced and stowed. Text messaging during class meetings is not permitted. Newspapers or other non-course related reading materials should not be read during class. Laptops are to be used only for note-taking, accessing the readings, and class activities. Any student in violation of these rules will only be asked once to turn off electronic devices and/or put any superfluous materials away before being asked to leave the classroom for the rest of the period. I reserve the right to penalize repeat offenders of this policy with a grade reduction.

8. University Policies

Academic Integrity

I expect all students to adhere to principles of honesty, fairness, and integrity in this class. Please consult with me or NU-Q's guidelines on academic integrity if you have questions about the acceptability of any specific behavior (see <https://my.qatar.northwestern.edu/academic-resources/policies/integrity.html>)

- ★ Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to cheating on an exam (e.g., copying others' answers, providing information to others, using a crib sheet), plagiarism of a paper (e.g., taking material from readings without citation, copying another student's paper), or allowing another person to do one's work and submitting that it under one's own name. All submitted work will be checked via Turnitin.com.
- ★ Failure to maintain academic integrity on an assignment may result (among other things) in loss of credit for the assignment, failing the class, or academic suspension.
- ★ For citations, please use the APA citation style (see <https://www.qatar.northwestern.edu/library/referencing.html>)

Students Requesting Accommodations

Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other conditions is required to register with AccessibleNU-Q (4454-5073) for determination of reasonable academic accommodations. All information will remain confidential. For more information visit: <https://my.qatar.northwestern.edu/student-life/wellness/accessiblenu-q/index.html>

- ★ I am happy to provide any reasonable accommodation for a documented disability provided that a student discusses it with me at least a week in advance.
- ★ Students should see the Coordinator for Health and Wellness Ms. Patti Collins in her office Room 3088 to obtain a letter that identifies reasonable academic accommodations. She can be reached at her office phone number 4454-5073 and email: patricia.collins@northwestern.edu

Sexual Harassment Policy:

It is the policy of Northwestern University that no member of the Northwestern community—students, faculty, administrators, staff, vendors, contractors, or third parties—may sexually harass any other member of the community. Sexual harassment is any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, which includes, but is not limited to, unwelcome sexual advances; the use or threatened use of sexual favors as a basis for academic or employment decisions; conduct that creates a hostile, intimidating or offensive academic or working environment; conduct that has

the effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance; and other verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature that sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive to limit a person's ability to participate in or benefit from an educational program or activity. For more information, visit: <http://www.northwestern.edu/sexual-harassment/policy/index.html>.

9. Schedule

The following is a tentative schedule of topics, readings, and assignments. Please note that this schedule is subject to change. The up-to-date schedule will be posted on Canvas. Please always check the Canvas schedule!

Week 1- Introduction

K. Hjortshoj, "Reading: How to Stay on Top of It"

Video: AlJazeera UpFront - Should free speech be protected, not matter what? (30 min)

Week 2 - Free Speech

J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*, chs. 1-4

Week 3 - Speech Act Theory

J.L. Austin, *Performative Utterances*

M. Morris, *An Introduction to Philosophy of Language*, ch. 12)

Week 4 - Silencing Speech

R. Langton, *Speech Acts & Unspeakable Acts*

Week 5 - Slurs

E. Camp, *Slurring Perspectives*

K.E. Himma, *On the Definition of Unconscionable Racial and Sexual Slurs*

Week 6 - Authority and Subordinating Speech

R. Kukla, *Slurs, Ideology, and Interpellation*

I. Maitra, *Subordinating Speech*

➤ 1st Paper due

Week 7 - Speech and Genocide

L. Tirell, *Genocidal Language Games*

Week 8 - Blasphemy and Injury

T. Asad, *Free Speech, Blasphemy, and Secular Criticism*

A. Appiah, *What's Wrong with Defamation of Religion?*

Week 9 - Generics

S.J. Leslie, *Generics*

S.J. Leslie, *Carving Up the Social World With Generics*

Week 10 - Generics and their Effects

S. Haslanger, Ideology, Generics, and Common Ground

J. Saul, Are generics especially pernicious?

Week 11 - Counterspeech

K. Gelber, 'Speaking Back': The Likely Fate of Hate Speech Policy in the United States and Australia

L.B. Nielsen, Power in Public: Reactions, Responses, and Resistance to Offensive Public Speech

- 2nd Paper due

Week 12 - Testimonial Injustice

M. Fricker, Testimonial Injustice

M. Fricker, Hermeneutical Injustice

- In-class Exam

Week 13 - Propaganda & Ideology

J. Stanley, How Propaganda Works (chs. 2 and 5)

Week 14 - Wrap Up

- Final Project due during exam week.