INSTRUCTOR: David Beaver  
TIME: Wednesday 3-6p.m.  
LOCATION: RLP 4.710

DESCRIPTION

The goal of the class is to consider the problem political speech poses to philosophy of language and theoretical linguistics, and to understand political persuasion, propaganda, and the more subtle ways in which power and status is manifested and maintained in speech.

The theory of meaning in linguistics and philosophy is set up to explain cooperative information exchange. Yet, as feminist theorists, anti-colonial theorists, sociolinguists, anthropologists, sociologists, social psychologists, and many others have emphasized, language is often used for less than ideal purposes, e.g. to dominate and exclude. Such uses of language do not seem to fit the idealizations theorists of meaning typically assume.

But what are the idealizations, and can existing semantic and pragmatic accounts be extended to account for aspects of speech that manifest power and social status?

The class will be based on readings from sociolinguistics, philosophy of language, social psychology, political science, and semantics/pragmatics, and structured around a forthcoming book joint between the instructor and the philosopher Jason Stanley.

TOPICS

Subject to interests of participants, I will organize the class around three five week topics:

Topic 1: Slurs and stereotypes, race and gender  
Topic 2: Propaganda and political speech  
Topic 3: The toolkit for analyzing political language: speech acts, accommodation, game theory, and beyond

REQUIREMENTS

This is a discussion seminar with weekly readings, short discussion posts to introduce questions to be discussed in class, and a choice between writing a single final paper or two shorter papers.
READINGS

1 primary and 1 secondary per week to be selected from the following:

Bartlett, F. C. Political Propaganda. 1940.
Burnett, Heather. Signalling games, sociolinguistic variation and the construction of style. Linguistics and Philosophy. 1:32
Burnett, Heather. (accepted). “A Persona-based Semantics for Slurs”. article accepted in Gratzer Philosophische Studien, special issue on non-derogatory uses of slurs (B. Cepollaro, & D. Zeman (eds.))
Doob, Leonard W. “Goeoebels’ Principles of Propaganda.” (1950)
Franz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), (pp. 1-23.)
Lasswell, Harold D. Propaganda Technique in the World War. 1927.
Mann, Kate, Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018
Sprooule, Channels of Propaganda. (1994)
Swanson, Eric. Forthcoming. “Slurs and Ideologies.” In Ideology, ed. by Robin Celikates, Sally Haslanger, and Jason Stanley, Oxford University Press.