

Propaganda and Social Exclusion

Professor: Bryce Huebner

Office: 234 New North

Office hours: T 2:00-3:00; and by appointment

Course meets:

T & Th 3:30-4:45

Location: Walsh 394

Propaganda and other forms of politically motivated rhetoric are frequently used in political campaigns, public policy campaigns, and social movements; they also lie at the core of modern forms of advertising and popular culture. Recently, we've seen a lot of propaganda floating around on social media, and worries about how to fight 'fake news' have recently started to come to center stage. But the problem of propaganda is nothing new. Plato worried about the impact of political rhetoric on our self-understanding as social and ethical beings; and many other European philosophers have been troubled by the effect of systematically distorted forms of communication. We won't focus on this tradition in this class, but it will certainly emerge in our discussions of the ways in which philosophical and empirical tools can be brought to bear on questions about ideology and propaganda.

Our primary aim in this course will be to figure out what propaganda is, by looking at different forms of distorting speech and exclusionary actions. We will also be examining the ways in which socially relevant speech are employed to dehumanize and exclude whole groups of people. As we work through the course, we will be drawing on a host of multidisciplinary perspectives. So while our primary approach will be always be philosophical, we will read things that have been writing by anthropologists, cultural psychologists, cognitive scientists, and social theorists (as well as philosophers). No background knowledge of philosophy or any of these other disciplines is expected or required. But there is a twist, which makes this class an exercise in *doing* philosophy. When it comes to figuring out what propaganda is, we're going to have to work through this together! Instead of giving you my preferred answer to this question, we'll be working collaboratively to figure out what makes communication propagandistic. And hopefully, by the end of the class, we'll have new and interesting things to say in that respect.

Course Requirements:

10%	Ongoing	This will be a discussion-oriented class, and you will be expected to take part in the class discussion. But we'll also do group-work if you're apprehensive about talking in class.
15%	Ongoing	You must give one 3-5 minute presentation on an example of propagandistic or exclusionary speech that is interesting to you. A sign-up sheet will be posted early in the semester with the dates that are available for presentations.
You must write three short papers over the course of the semester. You can write on any issue that we have addressed in 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 beforehand—many of you will want to write one paper on the topic you present on, and I will generally support that option).		
20%	Prior to 2/16	Submit a brief paper (max: 750 words)
20%	Prior to 3/23	Submit a brief paper (max: 750 words)
20%	Prior to 4/20	Submit a brief paper (max: 750 words)
15%	5/7	At the end of the semester, you must write a brief narrative detailing what you have learned in the class, as well as what questions you feel have been left unresolved, and what it would take to address them adequately.

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).

Presentations: presentation grades will be based on the success of your presentation (evaluated by the class; and evaluated by the professor). A grading rubric 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!

Course schedule:

	1/11 Introduction: No reading
1/16 Regina Rini , " Fake News and Partisan Epistemology " (11pp)	1/18 Annie Gowen & Max Bearak , "Fake news on Facebook..." (3pp) Hannah Beech , "No Such Thing as Rohingya" (~4pp)
1/23 Jennifer Saul , "Racial Figleaves, the Shifting Boundaries of the Permissible, and the Rise of Donald Trump" (19pp)	1/25 Angela Davis , "Afro Images: Politics, fashion, and nostalgia." (7pp)
1/30 Lynne Tirrell , "Toxic Speech: Toward an Epidemiology of Discursive Harm" (21pp)	2/1 Lisa Feldman Barrett , "When is speech violence" (3pp) Patrick Lee Miller , "Freedom of speech." (5pp)
2/6 Greg Lukianoff & Jon Haidt , "The Coddling of the American mind" (11pp)	2/8 Aviva Chomsky , "Will the millennial movement rebuild the ivory tower or be crushed by it?" (7pp)
2/13 Justin Khoo , "Code words in political discourse" (29pp)	2/15 ...continued...
2/20 Molly Crockett , "Moral outrage in the digital age" (3pp)	2/22 Watch: Michael Lynch , " How to see past your own perspective and find truth " (14 min)
2/27 Luvell Anderson , "Hermeneutical Impasses" (18pp)	3/1 Arlie Russell Hochschild , "The American right: Its deep story" (4pp) Katherine Cramer , "For years, I've been watching anti-elite fury build in Wisconsin. Then came Trump." (3pp)
3/13 Rachel D. Godsil & L. Song Richardson , "Racial Anxiety" (28pp, but a quick read if you skip the footnotes)	3/15 (optional) Amy Krosch et al , "Race and recession: The effect of economic scarcity and egalitarian motivation on racial discrimination" (read only if you're really interested)
3/20 Rebecca Kukla , "Shame, Seduction, and Character in Food Messaging." (20pp)	3/22 (optional) Christina van Dyke , "Eating as a Gendered Act: Christianity, Feminism, and Reclaiming the Body" (11pp)
3/27 Todd Kliman , "Coding and decoding dinner"	

4/3-4/5 Patrick Radden Keefe , "The Family That Built an Empire of Pain." (30pp)	
4/10 Derrick Bell , "Brown v Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma." (16pp)	4/12 Watch Irami Osei-Frimpong . " Do black lives matter? " (14min)
4/17 Tommie Shelby , "Impure Dissent: Hip Hop and the Political Ethics of Marginalized Black Urban Youth." (28pp)	4/19 Mina Cikara & Jay Van Bavel , "The Flexibility of Racial Bias" (6pp)
4/24 Myisha Cherry , "State Racism, State Violence, & Vulnerable Solidarity." (13pp)	4/26 No Reading : Time for reflecting back on what we've learned and what we still have left to learn