

Speech Act Theory and Political Philosophy

Syllabus

Requirements:	Open to all undergraduate philosophy students year 2, 3, and 4
Course type:	Elective
Academic hours:	28 (14 lecture, 14 seminar)
Instructor:	Dr. Silver Bronzo
Email:	silverbronzo@hse.ru
Class meets:	Tuesdays, 17:00-20:00, from January 29 to March 12
Room:	JI-507.
Office Hours:	After class, room A207, or appointment (don't hesitate to ask!)
Course website:	https://silverbronzo.wordpress.com/for-my-students
	Password: communicated in class or via email upon request

§1. Abstract

Can speech violate the rights of others? What are the limits, if any, of freedom of speech? Can speech be oppressive? If it can, what are the possible forms of resistance? Is censorship the only option? This class discusses whether philosophy of language can give us useful tools for answering questions of this sort. Its topic lies, accordingly, at the intersection of philosophy of language and political philosophy. It provides an introduction to some major ideas in Anglophone philosophy of language, with a special emphasis on Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics, and examines how such ideas have been used by political philosophers to discuss questions of freedom, harm, violence, oppression, ideology, prejudice, and resistance. Special attention will be given to John Austin's classic *How To Do Things With Words* and its legacy.

§2. Learning objectives

This course has two general objectives:

- Introduce students to some central theories, notions, and distinctions in contemporary philosophy of language, with a special emphasis on Speech Act Theories and Pragmatics.
- Introduce students to some recent uses of these ideas in contemporary political philosophy and feminist philosophy.

§3. Learning outcomes

By taking this course, students will improve their capacity to carry out the following general tasks:

- Read and understand complex philosophical texts written in English
- Actively engage with philosophical texts
- Reconstruct and critically evaluate arguments
- Productively engage in classroom discussion
- Write essays that have both an exegetical and a critical dimension

Moreover, students will acquire the following more specific capacities:

- Master Austin’s distinction between constative and performative utterances; his distinction between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts; and his notions of uptake and misfire.
- Master the linguistic notions of presupposition, accommodation, common ground, and generic statements.
- Engage critically with the main aspects of Austin’s *How To Do Things With Words*.
- Describe and discuss critically how some contemporary philosophers (Rae Langton, Lynne Tirrell, Sally Haslanger) have used the aforementioned ideas in political philosophy.

§4. Course plan

IMPORTANT! The “required readings” must be read *in advance* – that is, *before* coming to the class for which they have been assigned.

Meeting	Topic	Readings
1 st Meeting January 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to J. L. Austin. • Austin on constative and performative utterances • Collapse of the distinction 	Required readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John L. Austin, <i>How to Do things with Words</i> (1955), Lectures I-II Optional readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John L. Austin, <i>How to Do things with Words</i> (1955), Lectures III-VII • Martin Gustafsson, Introduction to <i>The Philosophy of J. L. Austin</i> (2011), Section IV: “Austin’s Legacy” • J. L. Austin, “Performative Utterances” (1956)
2 nd Meeting (February 5)	Austin, continued: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locutionary, Illocutionary, and Perlocutionary Acts • Uptake and Misfire 	Required readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John L. Austin, <i>How to Do things with Words</i> (1955), Lectures VIII-XII Optional readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter Strawson, “Intention and Convention in Speech Acts” (1964) • Ted Cohen, “Illocution and Perlocution” (1973)
3 rd Meeting (February 12)	Rae Langton: Pornography as an illocutionary act of <i>subordination</i>	Required readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rae Langton, “Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts” (1993), pp. 293-314

4 th Meeting (February 19)	Rae Langton: Pornography as an illocutionary act of <i>silencing</i>	Required readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rae Langton, “Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts” (1993), pp. 314-330.
5 th Meeting (February 26)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presupposition, accommodation, and common ground • Blocking and counter-speech 	Required readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rae Langton, “Blocking as Counter-speech” (2017) Optional readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Lewis, “Scorekeeping in a language game” (1979) • Robert Stalnaker, “Common Ground” (2002) • Rae Langton, “The Authority of Hate Speech” (2017)
6 th Meeting (March 5)	Slurs and violence	Required readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lynne Tirrell, “Genocidal Language Games” (2012)
7 th Meeting (March 12)	Generics, ideology, and prejudice	Required readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sally Haslanger, “Ideology, Generics, and Common Ground” (2011) Optional readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sarah-Jane Leslie, “The Original Sin of Cognition: Fear, Prejudice and Generalization” (2017)
Friday, March 22, 24:00	Deadline for turning in the final paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is an absolute deadline! Late papers will not be accepted!!! • Papers should be sent in electronic format (PDF or Microsoft Word) to silverbronz@hse.ru. • For the formal and substantial requirements of the paper, see below, §7.

§5. Readings

a) Required Readings

- John L. Austin, *How to Do things with Words*
HSE LIBRARY ONLINE, Oxford Scholarship Online:
<http://proxylibrary.hse.ru:2225/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198245537.001.0001/acprof-9780198245537>
- Rae Langton, “Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts” (1993), chap. 1 of R. Langton, *Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification* (2012)
HSE LIBRARY ONLINE, Oxford Scholarship Online:
<http://proxylibrary.hse.ru:2225/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199247066.001.0001/acprof-9780199247066>
- Rae Langton, “Blocking as Counter-speech” (2017), chap. 6 of D. Fogal et al. (eds.), *New Work on Speech Acts* (2018)
HSE LIBRARY ONLINE, Oxford Scholarship Online:
<http://proxylibrary.hse.ru:2225/view/10.1093/oso/9780198738831.001.0001/oso-9780198738831-chapter-6>

- Lynne Tirrell, “Genocidal Language Games” (2012), in I. Maitra and M. K. McGowan (eds.), *Speech and Harm: Controversies Over Free Speech* (2012)
HSE LIBRARY ONLINE, Oxford Scholarship Online:
<http://proxylibrary.hse.ru:2225/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199236282.001.0001/acprof-9780199236282-chapter-8>
- Sally Haslanger, “Ideology, Generics, and Common Ground” (2011), in C. Witt (ed.). *Feminist Metaphysics: Explorations in the Ontology of Sex, Gender, and the Self* (2011)
HSE LIBRARY ONLINE, SpringerLink:
https://proxylibrary.hse.ru:2184/chapter/10.1007/978-90-481-3783-1_11

b) Optional Readings

- Martin Gustafsson, Introduction to *The Philosophy of J. L. Austin* (2011), Section IV: “Austin’s Legacy”
HSE LIBRARY ONLINE, Oxford Scholarship Online:
<http://proxylibrary.hse.ru:2225/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199219759.001.0001/acprof-9780199219759-chapter-1>
- J. L. Austin, “Performative Utterances” (1956), chap. 10 of J. Austin, *Philosophical Papers* (1979)
HSE LIBRARY ONLINE, Oxford Scholarship Online:
<http://proxylibrary.hse.ru:2225/view/10.1093/019283021X.001.0001/acprof-9780192830210-chapter-10>
- Peter Strawson, “Intention and Convention in Speech Acts,” *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 73, No. 4 (1964): 439-470
HSE LIBRARY ONLINE, Electronic Periodicals Database, JSTOR.
<https://proxylibrary.hse.ru:2066/?refreqid=excelsior%3Ad5c411d0f25c6db6a6f6bfcf10134488>
- Ted Cohen, “Illocution and Perlocution” (1973), *Foundations of Language*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (1973): 492-503
HSE LIBRARY ONLINE, Electronic Periodicals Database, JSTOR.
<https://proxylibrary.hse.ru:2066/?refreqid=excelsior%3Ad5c411d0f25c6db6a6f6bfcf10134488>
- David Lewis, “Scorekeeping in a language game,” *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1979): 339-359
HSE LIBRARY ONLINE, Electronic Periodicals Database, JSTOR.
<https://proxylibrary.hse.ru:2066/?refreqid=excelsior%3Ad5c411d0f25c6db6a6f6bfcf10134488>
- Robert Stalnaker, “Common Ground,” *Linguistics and Philosophy*, Vol. 25, No. 5/6 (2002): 701-721.
HSE LIBRARY ONLINE, Electronic Periodicals Database, JSTOR.
<https://proxylibrary.hse.ru:2066/?refreqid=excelsior%3Ad5c411d0f25c6db6a6f6bfcf10134488>
- Rae Langton, “The Authority of Hate Speech,” in J. Gardner et al., *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Law Volume 3*, 2018.
HSE LIBRARY ONLINE, Oxford Scholarship Online:
<http://proxylibrary.hse.ru:2225/view/10.1093/oso/9780198828174.001.0001/oso-9780198828174-chapter-4>
- Sarah-Jane Leslie, “The Original Sin of Cognition: Fear, Prejudice and Generalization,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vo. 114, No. 8 (2017): 393-421.
OPEN SOURCE:
<https://www.princeton.edu/~sjleslie/The%20original%20sin%20of%20cognition%20upd010518.pdf>

§6. Requirements and grade distribution

Final paper. An essay (4-5 pages, double-spaced, in English) on some of the readings discussed in this course (see details below, §7).	100% of final grade
Classroom Participation	Up to 1 extra point (out of 10) toward the final grade. (For example, if you get a 7/10 on your final paper, but your participation was really excellent, you will get a 9/10 for the course.)
Attendance and Preparation. You are required to attend the lectures and come to class prepared by doing the required readings for each class in advance.	Enforced indirectly via the extra points for classroom participation.

§7. Requirements for the final paper

- Your paper must engage in detail with some (one or more) of the *required readings assigned in this course* (see §11 below).
- Your paper must *make a point*. Simply summarizing the views of one or more authors does *not* count as making a point.
- The paper must be double-spaced, font size #12, 4-5 pages.
- At the beginning of your paper, you must clearly indicate: Your full name; Name of the Course; Name of the Instructor; Academic Module; Title of your paper.
- At the end of the paper, you must include a bibliography of the works you cite.
- The paper should be sent in electronic format (PDF or Microsoft Word) to silverbronzozo@hse.ru by **Friday, March 22, 24:00**. This is an absolute deadline, no late paper will be accepted!
- The title of the file must include your last name.

§8. Guidelines for knowledge assessment

Final paper. The final paper will be graded according to these criteria:

- **Exegetical accuracy:** How accurately the student has represented the views of the authors under discussion.
- **Relevance:** Whether the paper engages in detail with some of the required readings assigned in this course.
- **Thesis and arguments:** Presence of a clear thesis (i.e., whether you make a point) and of plausible arguments in support of the thesis.
- **Clarity:** The clarity with which the paper is organized, and the clarity with which specific thesis and arguments are presented. Grammatical and stylistic infelicities will not be taken into account in grading your paper, as long as they do not affect the sense of what you are saying.

Participation. Any form of classroom participation is encouraged and valued. Students are particularly encouraged to:

- Simply ask the instructor to repeat or further explain something that they didn't understand.
- Raise objections to the arguments under discussion.
- Try to explain why they don't find a given argument convincing.
- Ask questions or make comments about the connection between different texts discussed in the course.

9. Grading system

Grades will be assigned according to the 10-point scale adopted by HSE:

ETCS grades		10-point scale	5-point scale
A+	Excellent	10	5
A	Very good	9	5
A-	Very good	8	5
B+	Good	7	4
B-	Good	6	4
C+	Satisfactory	5	3
C-	Satisfactory	4	3
F	Fail	3	2
F	Fail	2	2
F	Fail	1	2

§10. Plagiarism

You commit plagiarism when you take something that somebody else has written and include it in your paper as if it were your own work. In order to avoid plagiarism, you must properly quote any stretch of text that you take from somebody else—that is, you must place it in quotation marks and indicate its author. In accordance to the general policy of HSE, plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. **Students who plagiarize will receive a 0 on their paper, and will consequently fail the course.** Committing plagiarism may also result in disciplinary actions, including expulsion from the University.

§11. Methods of instruction

The instructor will (a) present in class the main arguments contained in the assigned readings, using Power Point presentations (lecture slides will be made available to students on the website of the course after each class) and (b) involve students in classroom discussion.