

# Language & Politics

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OH: W 2:00-4:00 (and by appointment)

Government 6775 (Spring 2013)  
Cornell University  
T 4:30-6:30  
Kramnick Seminar Room

One should never forget that language, by virtue of the infinite generative but also originative capacity...which it derives from its power to produce existence by producing collectively recognized, and thus realized, representations of existence, is no doubt the principal support of the dream of absolute power.

Pierre Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*

The lordly right of giving names extends so far that one should allow oneself to conceive the origin of language itself as an expression of power on the part of rulers: they say “this *is* this and this,” they seal every thing and event with a sound and, as it were, take possession of it.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

## Course description

Much has been made of the linguistic turn taken by twentieth-century philosophy, but language has been a central topic of philosophical concern since (at least) Plato. Language has also played an important, if sometimes neglected, role in political theory. This seminar will explore the consequences of different philosophies of language for the study and theorization of politics, and also the politics that attend different philosophies of language. While the seminar’s organization is largely chronological – beginning with Locke’s empiricism and ending with a debate about discourse and the body – it will focus primarily on twentieth-century debates over the relationship between language, knowledge, and power, with particular emphasis on ordinary language philosophy (Austin, Cavell, Wittgenstein) and different versions of poststructuralism (Derrida, de Man, Butler). Wittgenstein’s later work stands at the center of the course and will occupy much of our time. We will spend several weeks exploring Wittgenstein’s later writing (*On Certainty* and *Philosophical Investigations*) and evaluating its impact on contemporary political theory.

## Course mechanics

This is a graduate seminar in political theory. Students will be evaluated on a research paper (20-25 pages) due at the semester’s end (60% of the final grade), one short (7-8 page) essay on the week’s reading (15%), and one 10-minute oral presentation discussing another student’s essay (15%). General participation will count for the remaining 10% of the final grade. We will begin each seminar with these oral

presentations. Please avoid summary and feel free to be thoughtfully contentious in your essays. These should be posted on blackboard no later than 10:00 Sunday morning before seminar. The 10-minute oral presentation should also avoid summary and instead pose a series of textually supported critical questions that can provoke a broader seminar discussion. A sign-up sheet for both presentations and discussions will be available the first week of class.

### **Books to purchase**

Available at the University Bookstore:

J.L. Austin, *How to do things with words*  
M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*  
Cressida J. Heyes (editor), *The Grammar of Politics* (recommended)  
John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*  
Friedrich Nietzsche *Philosophy and Truth*  
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages*  
Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty; Philosophical Investigations*

Material marked “\*” on blackboard under “course documents.”

#### **WEEK 1 (January 22): Communication and Power**

Theodor Adorno, “Morality and Style”\*  
George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language” \*

#### **WEEK 2 (January 29): Language and Knowledge: Locke**

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (“Of Speech,” “Of Reason and Science”) \*  
John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (43-65, 402-525)  
Paul de Man, “The Epistemology of Metaphor,” *Critical Inquiry* (Autumn 1978)\*

#### **WEEK 3 (February 5): Language and Passion: Rousseau**

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages which treats of Melody and Musical Imitation; Social Contract*, 84-88\*; *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men*, 144-49\*  
Brian Garsten, “Persuading without Convincing: Rousseau”\*

#### **WEEK 4 (February 12): Language and Becoming: Nietzsche**

Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in an Extramoral Sense,” in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the Early 1870’s*, 79-97

## **WEEKS 5 (February 19): Dialogue and Speech Genres: Bakhtin**

M.M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 259-422; "The Problem of Speech Genres"\*

## **WEEKS 6-8 (February 26, March 5, March 12): Wittgenstein**

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty; Philosophical Investigations*

1. Simple, naming, acquiring language, meaning as use.  
*Investigations I* (paras. 1-65).
2. Family resemblances.  
*Investigations I* (paras. 65-81, 108-09, 164-75, 179).
3. Private language.  
*Investigations I* (paras. 243-315, 348-415, 580); II (xi, pp220-29).
4. Rules and rule following.  
*Investigations I* (paras. 81-91, 142-243); *On Certainty* (paras. 21-34, 43-50, 61-65, 93-100, 139-40, 308, 493-98, 519, 564-7).
5. Language games and forms of life.  
*Investigations*, review 1 & 2 above; I (paras. 130, 136, 142-46, 156, 179, 191, 195-206, 217, 241-44, 249, 261, 282, 288, 290, 321, 325, 415, 441, 454, 485-86, 499, 500, 540-42, 576-84, 644-46, 654-56, 669); II (pp. 174-75, 179, 200, 218-219, 223-24, 226, 230); *On Certainty* (paras. 24-25, 56, 65, 82-83, 229, 256, 260, 315, 358-9, 374-75, 391-93, 403, 411, 446, 457, 477).
6. Conception of philosophy.  
*Investigations*, Preface; I (paras. 109-33, 144, 182-84, 188, 192-96, 251-55, 308-09, 436, 593); II (p. xiv).

## **WEEK 9 (March 19): Spring Break**

## **WEEK 10 (March 26): Wittgenstein and Political Theory: Contemporary Views**

Aletta Norval, "Democratic Identification: A Wittgensteinian Approach"\*

Gail Pohlhaus and John R. Wright, "Using Wittgenstein Critically"\*

James Tully, "Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy"\*

Linda Zerilli, "Feminism's Flight from the Ordinary"\*

## **WEEK 11 (April 2): Cavell and the Politics of the Ordinary**

Stanley Cavell, "The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy" \*

Stanley Cavell, "The Argument of the Ordinary: Scenes of Instruction in Wittgenstein and in Kripke," "The Conversation of Justice: Rawls and the Drama of Consent" in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 64-126\*

Stanley Cavell, "Criteria and Judgment," "Criteria and Skepticism"\*

Stanley Cavell, "Declining Decline: Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture"\*

Stanley Cavell, "The *Investigations*' Everyday Aesthetics of Itself"\*

**WEEK 12 (April 9): Austin and Performative Speech**

J.L. Austin, *How to do things with words*

Jacques Derrida, "Declarations of Independence"\*

**WEEK 13 (April 16): Authority and Context**

Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context"\*

John Searle, "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida" \*

Stanley Cavell, "Performative and Passionate Utterance"\*

**WEEK 14 (April 23): Language, Power, and 'Body Hexis'**

Pierre Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*, 37-65, 103-59\*

Judith Butler, "Implicit Censorship and Discursive Agency"\*

**WEEK 15 (April 30): BOOK TBA (Beyond the Linguistic Turn)**

Final paper due Wednesday, May 15<sup>th</sup> at 12:00 in 307 White Hall.