University of St Andrews — Department of Philosophy
PY4664 Ethics of Conversation

Semester 1 2023-24

30 Credits

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KEY MODULE INFORMATION

Lectures: Wednesday 11-1**,** Arts Seminar Room 7
Seminars: Beginning in Week 2
Group 1: Th 9-10, Edgecliffe G01
Group 2: Th 10-11, Edgecliffe G01
Group 3: Th 11-12, Edgecliffe G01

Module convenor and lecturer: Dr Justin Snedegar, js280@st-andrews.ac.uk
Office hour: Edgecliffe B11, Wednesday 10-11am

Co-lecturer: Dr Justin D'Ambrosio, jzd1@st-andrews.ac.uk
Office hour: Edgecliff B17, Monday 4-5pm

Assessment: 100% Coursework

1. Three 800 word critical summaries, due in weeks of your choosing, before relevant lecture: 40%
2. 3000 word essay, due by 6 December at 23:59: 60%

GENERAL INFORMATION

Module Description: This module is about ways that conversations about important but difficult issues, especially moral and political ones, can go well or badly. It will touch on topics from social epistemology, the philosophy of language, ethics, moral psychology, moral responsibility, and social and political philosophy. Specific topics may include moral criticism, anger, civility, hypocrisy, polarisation, epistemic injustice, trust, lying, gaslighting, echo chambers, conspiracy theories, Fake News, free speech, no platforming, and others. We'll be thinking about how to understand these ideas, what roles they play in our social and political lives, and what the ethical issues surrounding them may be.

ASSESSMENT

Weighting and components:

- Three 800 word critical summaries, 40% total.
- One 3000 word final essay, 60%.

Critical Summaries:

Word Limit: 800 words each

Deadline: Before lecture in the week on which you are writing, i.e. Wednesday at 10:59am

Task: The critical summaries of 800 words should be based on the assigned reading for the seminar, and should be submitted before the lecture in which those readings will be discussed—i.e., by 10:59am Wednesday of the week for which the reading is assigned. Note that we will discuss the seminar reading in the week for which it is assigned—e.g., the seminar in week 2 will be focused on the required reading for week 2. If you are especially interested in one of the recommended articles and would like to write a critical summary of it instead, you may do so.

You should summarize the main argument of the reading, or at least the part of the main argument on which your critical engagement will focus. You must also critically engage with the material, either by formulating an objection or raising a thoughtful question and thinking about potential answers and their implications for the main argument.

The critical summaries will give you the chance to think about a broad range of topics from the module, but will do so in a way that lets you stay up-to-date and engaged throughout the semester, rather than encouraging you to cram for an exam during the revision period. They will be marked on the standard 20-point scale, though the fact that you haven't yet had a seminar on the topic will be taken into consideration. It is up to you when to write them (any three of weeks 2-11, except the ILW in Week 6), but remember that you must do **three** for the semester. They must include both a brief summary of the reading and,

most importantly, critical comments or questions. A sample critical summary will be provided.

Your final essay may, but need not, build on one of your critical summaries. This gives you the opportunity to work on an idea over multiple stages of development, taking feedback into consideration.

Final Essay:

Word Limit: 3000 words

Deadline: 6 December, 23:59.

Task: The purpose of the final essay is for students to critically reflect on one or more key issues discussed in the class. Students should formulate their own essay question/topic. It may, but need not, build on one of your critical summaries. It would be a good idea to briefly discuss the question or topic you are going to address with one of the lecturers.

LECTURE PLAN & ESSENTIAL READINGS

Readings can be found easily using the information below, through the university library (e.g. via Oxford Scholarship Online) or on JSTOR, www.philpapers.org, etc. DOI links have been provided for many of the readings, as well.

Week 1: What is Conversation?

Main reading: Maxime Lepoutre: *Democratic Speech in Divided Times*, Introduction. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198869757.001.0001

Recommended:

- Paul Grice. 'Logic and conversation'. In *Studies in the Way of Words*, 1989, 22–40.
- Zoltán Gendler Szabó. 'The goal of conversation'. Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume, 94 (1):57–86, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1093/arisup/akaa005
- Robert Stalnaker, 'Common Ground', *Linguistics and Philosophy* 25: 701-721, 2002. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1020867916902
- Robert Stalnaker, *Inquiry*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1987
- Craige Roberts, 'Information Structure in Discourse: Toward an Integrated Theory of Formal Pragmatics'. https://doi.org/10.3765/sp.5.6

Week 2: Norms of Conversation

Main reading: Maxime LePoutre: *Democratic Speech in Divided Times*, Chapter 1, 'Offering Shared Reasons'. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198869757.001.0001

Recommended:

- Jennifer Lackey, 'Norms of Assertion', *Nous*, 2007. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0068.2007.00664.x
- Robin Lakoff, 'The Logic of Politeness; or, Minding your Ps and Qs', In C. Corum, T. Cedric Smith-Stark, & A. Weiser (Eds.), Papers from the 9th Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society. Chicago Linguistic Society, 292-305. The Logic of Politeness: or, Minding Your P's and Q's: Ingenta Connect
- Anthony Simon Laden, 'Norms of Conversation', *Reasoning: A Social Picture,* Oxford University Press, 2012. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199606191.001.0001
- Sandford Goldberg, *Conversational Pressure: Normativity in Speech Exchanges*, Oxford University Press, 2020 https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198856436.001.0001

Week 3: Violating Conversational Norms

Main reading:

- Michael Hannon, 'Public Discourse and its Problems', *Philosophy, Politics, and Economics*, vol. 22(3) 336-356, 2023, symposium on *Democratic Speech in Divided Times*. DOI: 10.1177/1470594X221100578

Recommended:

- Harry Frankfurt, *On Bullshit*, Princeton University Press 2005, *https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt7t4wr*
- Andreas Stokke, *Insincerity*, NOÛS 48:3 (2014) 496-520, https://doi.org/10.1111/nous.12001
- George Orwell, 'Politics and the English Language'
- Maxime Lepoutre, *Democratic Speech in Divided Times*, Ch.s 3 and 4
- Renee Jorgensen Bolinger, "The Pragmatics of Slurs", *Noûs,* 51(3) 439-462, https://doi.org/10.1111/nous.12090
- Justin D'Ambrosio, 'A Theory of Manipulative Speech', manuscript.
- Justin D'Ambrosio, 'Manipulative Underspecification', manuscript

Week 4: Anger

This week examines the role of *anger* in conversation. Standardly, anger is dismissed as a threat to reasoned dialogue, and rational judgment or behaviour in general. The readings for this week argue that anger can, on the contrary, be both apt and productive, in many instances.

Lecture: Amia Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger" in *The Journal of Political Philosophy* (2018), Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 123-144. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12130

Recommended:

- Sukaina Hirji, "Outrage and the bounds of empathy", *Philosophers' Imprint* 22, 2022. https://doi.org/10.3998/phimp.1296

- Maxim Lepoutre, *Democratic Speech in Divided Times*, ch. 3.
- Cheshire Calhoun, "The Virtue of Civility", in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (2000), Vol. 29, No. 3, pp. 251-275. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1088-4963.2000.00251.x
- Macalester Bell, *Hard Feelings: The Moral Psychology of Contempt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- Martha Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
- Marilyn Frye, "A Note on Anger" in *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1983), pp. 84-94.
- William Hazlitt, "On the Pleasure of Hating" (1821) in *The Plain Speaker: The Key Essays* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), ed. Duncan Wu, pp. 102-114.
- Myisha Cherry & Owen Flanagan (eds.) *The Moral Psychology of Anger* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019)

Week 5: Gaslighting

One way abusers, oppressors, and others who destroy the possibility of good faith, productive conversation can coerce their victims into agreeing with them and so doing what they want is by *gaslighting* them—undermining the confidence their victims should have in their own perceptions and evaluations of the world.

Main reading: Sophia Dandelet, "Epistemic coercion", *Ethics*, 131(3): 489-510, 2021. Epistemic Coercion (uchicago.edu)

Recommended:

- Kate Abramson, "Turning up the lights on gaslighting", *Philosophical Perspectives*, 24(1): 1-30, 2014. https://doi.org/10.1111/phpe.12046
- Natascha Rietdijk, "Post-truth politics and collective gaslighting", forthcoming in *Episteme*: https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2021.24
- Cynthia Stark, "Gaslighting, misogyny, and psychological oppression", *The Monist*, 102(2): 221-235, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1093/monist/onz007
- Thomas Carson, "Lying, deception, and related concepts", *The Philosophy of Deception*, Martin, ed., Oxford UP, 2009. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195327939.003.0010
- Teresa Marqués, "Disagreement with a Bald-Faced Liar", *Ratio*, 33(4), 255-268, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1111/rati.12268

Week 6: Independent Learning Week, No Class

Week 7: Apologizing & Forgiving

We inevitably have to deal with moral *wrongs*, and this leads to some of the most meaningful and contentious conversations we have as we attempt to repair things by going through the process of apology and forgiveness.

Main reading: Jeffrey S. Helmreich, "The Apologetic Stance" in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (2015), Vol. 43, No. 2, pp. 75-108. https://doi.org/10.1111/papa.12053

Recommended:

- Luc Bovens, "Apologies", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 108 (2008), pp. 219-239. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9264.2008.00244.x
- Margaret Urban Walker, "Forgiveness" in *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations after Wrongdoing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 151-190. https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.st-andrews.ac.uk/core/books/moral-repair/forgiving/22EFAB71939062EAA58CFC2B69A3383A
- Pamela Hieronymi, 'Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness" in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (2001), 62(3): 529-555. https://doi.org/10.2307/2653535.
- Lucy Allais, "Wiping the Slate Clean: The Heart of Forgiveness", *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 36(1), 2008, pp. 33-68. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1088-4963.2008.00123.x
- Adrienne M. Martin, "Owning up and Lowering Down: The Power of Apology" in *The Journal of Philosophy* (2010), 107(10): 534-553. http://www.jstor.org/stable/29778053
- Nick Smith, *I Was Wrong: The Meaning of Apologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
- Jeffrie Murphy & Jean Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
- Linda Radzik, *Making Amends: Atonement in Morality, Law, and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Week 8: When to Keep Quiet

Sometimes, and about some topics, we should *not* engage others in conversation. In what situations is this true, and why?

Main reading: Daniela Dover, "The walk and the talk", *Philosophical Review*, 128(4): 387-422, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1215/00318108-7697850

Recommended:

- Linda Radzik, "On the virtue of minding your own business", *Journal of Value Inquiry*, 46(2): 173-182, 2012. s10790-012-9317-1.pdf (springer.com)
- Maggie O'Brien, "Easy for you to say", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*. https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2021.1919723
- Cressida Gaukroger, "Privacy and the importance of 'getting away with it'", *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 17: 416-439, 2020. Privacy and the Importance of 'Getting Away With It' in: Journal of Moral Philosophy Volume 17 Issue 4 (2020) (brill.com)
- Thomas Nagel, "Concealment and exposure", *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 27(1): 3-30, 1998. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1088-4963.1998.tb00057.x
- Jessica Isserow & Colin Klein, "Hypocrisy and moral authority", *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*, 12(2): 191-222, 2017. https://doi.org/10.26556/jesp.v12i2.224
- K. Fritz & D. Miller, "Hypocrisy and the standing to blame", *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 99: 118-139, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1111/papq.12104
- Macalester Bell, "The standing to blame: a critique", in *Blame*, eds. Coates and Tognazzini, Oxford University Press, 2013. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199860821.003.0014

- Glenn Loury, "Self-Censorship in Public Discourse: A Theory of 'Political Correctness' and Related Phenomena, *Rationality and Society*, 6(4), 1994. https://doi.org/10.1177/1043463194006004002

Week 9: To Platform or Not to Platform?

Much of this module examines the duties of participants in conversation. But what about the duties that third parties (e.g., publishers, universities, social media platforms) might have to stop conversation, and/or speech, altogether? What are the ethics of content moderation or, as it is sometimes called, "No Platforming"?

Main reading: Robert Mark Simpson & Amia Srinivasan, "No Platforming" in *Academic Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), Ch. 11, pp. 187-210. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198791508.003.0011

Recommended:

- Jeffrey Howard, "Terror, Hate and the Demands of Counter-Speech" in *British Journal of Political Science* (2021), Vol. 51, No. 1, pp. 924-939. https://doi.org/10.1017/S000712341900053X
- Jeffery Howard, "Extreme speech, democratic deliberation, and social media", in Veliz (ed.) *Oxford Handbook of Digital Ethics*, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198857815.013.10
- Peters, U., Nottelmann, N. "Weighing the costs: the epistemic dilemma of no-platforming". *Synthese* **199**, 7231–7253 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-021-03111-w
- Barath Ganesh & Jonathan Bright, "Countering Extremists on Social Media: Challenges for Strategic Communication and Content Moderation" in *Policy & Internet* (2020), Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 6-19. 304672745.pdf (core.ac.uk)
- George Sher, "Debate: Taking Offense" in *Journal of Political Philosophy* (2020), Vol. 28, No. 3, pp. 332-342. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12228
- Jeremy Waldron, "Debate: Taking Offense: A Reply" in *Journal of Political Philosophy* (2020), Vol. 28, No. 3, pp. 343-352. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12229
- Emily McTernan, "Taking Offense: An Emotion Reconsidered" in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (2021), Vol. 49, No. 2, pp. 179-208. https://doi.org/10.1111/papa.12188
- C. Thi Nguyen, "How Twitter Gamifies Communication" in *Applied Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), ed. Jennifer Lackey, pp. 410-436. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198833659.003.0017
- Jonathan Haidt & Greg Lukianoff, "The Coddling of the American Mind" in *The Atlantic,* September 2015 Issue. How Trigger Warnings Are Hurting Mental Health on Campus - The Atlantic

Week 10: Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles

A healthy public discourse, as well as individual epistemic success, evidently involves input from different, often in some sense opposed, sources. A common worry is that many of us are trapped in epistemic bubbles or echo chambers, and so do not receive such input.

Main reading: Alex Worsnip, "The obligation to diversify one's sources: against epistemic partisanship in the consumption of news media", *Media Ethics: Free Speech and the Requirements of Democracy*, Fox and Saunders, eds., Chapter 13, Routledge, 2019.

Recommended:

- C. Thi Nguyen, "Echo chambers and epistemic bubbles", *Episteme*, 17(2): 141-161, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2018.32
- Neil Levy, "Fake news: rebuilding the epistemic landscape", in Veliz (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Digital Ethics*, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198857815.013.6
- Elizabeth Anderson, "Epistemic bubbles and authoritarian politics", in *Political Epistemology*, eds. Edenberg and Hannon, pp. 11-30, Oxford, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192893338.003.0002
- Regina Rini, "Fake News and partisan epistemology", *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, 27(2): 43-64, 2017. Fake News and Partisan Epistemology - Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal (georgetown.edu)
- Adam Etinson, "Some myths about ethnocentrism", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 96(2): 209-224, 2017. https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2017.1343363
- Hi-Phi Nation Podcast, Season 2, episode 10 on Echo Chambers. S2, Episode 10: Chamber of Facts – Hi-Phi Nation (hiphination.org)

Week 11: Conspiracy Theories

Many people are taken in by conspiracy theories, which is (often) bad both for them individually and for public discourse. This week we think about what conspiracy theories are and what is bad about them.

Lecture: Quassim Cassam, *Conspiracy Theories* (New York: Polity Press, 2019), Chs. 1 & 4, pp. 1-31, 92-126.

Recommended:

- Endre Begby, "Evidential Preemption", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 102(3), 515-530, May 2021, https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12654
- *Seminar*: Cass Sunstein, "Conspiracy theories", in *Conspiracy Theories & Other Dangerous Ideas*, Simon & Schuster, Chapter 1, 2016.
- Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics", *Harper's*, Nov. 1964, https://harpers.org/archive/1964/11/the-paranoid-style-in-american-politics/
- Quassim Cassam, *Conspiracy Theories* (New York: Polity Press, 2019).
- Rachel Fraser, "Epistemic FOMO" in *Cambridge Humanities Review* (), Issue 17: https://cambridgereview.cargo.site/Dr-Rachel-Fraser
- M.R.X. Dentith, "Debunking conspiracy theories", *Synthese* (2020), pp. 1-15.
- Michael Hannon, "Disagreement or badmouthing? The role of expressive discourse in politics", in *Political Epistemology*, eds. Edenberg and Hannon, Oxford, 2021.
- *VIDEO:* Netflix, "Behind the Curve"
- M. Giulia Napolitano, "Conspiracy Theories and Evidential Self-Insulation", in *The Epistemology of Fake News*, ed.s Bernecker, Floweree, Grundmann. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198863977.003.0005