# Philosophy 104

3.2 Notes

### Evaluative language:

- A word or phrase is evaluative if it is either:
  - Prescriptive: prescribes (recommends or discommends) some action.
  - Emotive: expresses a subjective evaluation of the goodness/badness/rightness/wrongness of what it modifies.
    - This is not to be confused with expressing a preference. There is a difference between saying "I like that singer" and "That singer is a good singer". The second is evaluative in the way in which we are interested, the first is not.
    - We are only interested in evaluative language insofar as it is a part of a conversational act.

### **Evaluative Language**

• Evaluative language implies either a conformity with some set of standards (for goodness/rightness/to-bedoneness) or a violation of such standards (for badness/wrongness/not-to-be-doneness)

#### Standards

- Becoming clear on what standards underlie each use of an evaluative term is the single most important and most overlooked part of value debate.
- Consider: what makes a good (or bad)...
  - Baseball player?
  - Automobile?
  - Person?
  - Cat?

### **Evaluative Disagreements**

- There are two kinds of evaluative disagreements:
  - Two people may disagree on the appropriate evaluative standards to be applied in some particular case. (e.g. is fuel-efficiency or power more important in an automobile?)
  - Two people who agree on the standards may disagree as to whether a particular thing meets or does not meet the standards (e.g. Bob and Joe agree that leadership is the most important part of being a good shortstop, but disagree on whether Cal Ripken was a good leader)

#### Identifying Evaluative Language:

- Sometimes whether evaluation is positive or negative is contained in the meaning of the term (e.g. wasteful, deceitful, beautiful, honest).
- Sometimes extra words make an ordinarily neutral descriptive term into a positive or negative evaluative term (too\_\_\_\_\_, not \_\_\_\_\_ enough).
- Sometimes whether evaluation is positive or negative is buried in context:
  - A: "Do you think Calvin would be good at basketball?"
  - B: "He's tall"

#### Identifying Evaluative Language:

- Sometimes whether evaluation is positive or negative is buried in context:
  - A: "Do you think Calvin would be good at basketball?"
  - B: "He's tall"
- We will mostly ignore such cases as the above. The intent is to focus on words whose meanings are evaluative and set aside words that are only evaluative in specific contexts.

### **Exercise VI**

- 1. E+
- **2.** D
- 3. E-
- **4.** E-
- 5. D
- 6. D
- 7. D
- 8. E-

- 9. E-
- 10. E-
- 11. D
- 12. E-
- 13. E-
- 14. D
- 15. D
- 16. E-

### Eupehemism/Dysphemism (1)

- A Euphemism is a word or phrase intended to make something bad sound neutral or good.
- A Dysphemism is a word or phrase intended to make something good or neutral sound bad.

## Euphemism/Dysphemism (2)

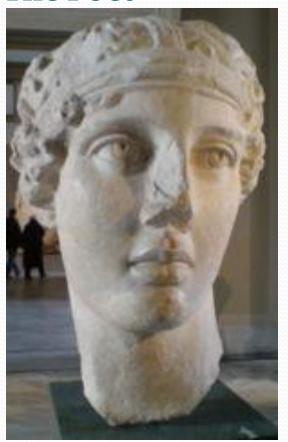
- The name of every piece of legislation passed at any level of government is a euphemism (these days).
- Euphemisms often replace euphemisms (e.g. toilet, shell-shock)
- Sometimes euphemisms are used out of politeness or sensitivity (e.g. euphemisms for death, PC language)
- Euphemisms sometimes lose their euphemismhood (e.g. lesbian)

### Lesbian...

#### The Island



**The Poet** 



### Spin Doctoring

- When Euphemism/Dysphemism is used as a form of attempted mind-control (effective so often it's shameful to our species) we call it spin doctoring
- As an exercise, try to spot euphemistic language in political debate, and change all the euphemisms to the most neutral language you can. This is a decent way to evaluate some political debate and disagreement.

### When euphemisms go bad...

- Slogans: often used to mislead and avoid real issues; remember, a slogan is NOT a position or an argument, though it may hint at a loose grouping of positions and arguments. Most slogan pairs are not even meaningful, much less mutually exclusive.
- Pro-Choice vs. Pro-Life
- Progressive Education vs. Back to Fundamentals
- Liberal vs. Conservative
- Alternative Lifestyle vs. Family Values