

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-be-doneness) 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 euphemism-hood (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