PL 321 (01): Philosophy of Language & Communication
Spring, 2013, Juniata College

Instructor: Dr. Xinli Wang, Philosophy Department, Goodhall 414, x-3642, wang@juniata.edu
Office Hours: MWF 10-11, and TuTh 11-12 or by appointment

Texts and Readings:

Required:
   [note: the 4th edition is fine]
3. Readings on P drive from the following books (please compile all the readings in a reading folder.
   Readings will be deleted from P drive in two weeks)

Recommended:
5. Claude Mangion, Philosophical Approaches to Communication, Intellect 2011 (PAC)

Other references:
(1) Peter Ludlow (ed.), Readings in the Philosophy of Language, MIT Press 1997 (RIPL)
(2) Andrea Nye (ed.), Philosophy of Language: the big questions, Blackwell 1998 (PLBQ)
(5) Jennifer Hornsby and Guy Longworth (eds.), Reading Philosophy of Language, Blackwell 2006 (RPL)
(6) Xinli Wang, Incommensurability and Cross-Language Communication, Ashgate 2007 (ICC)
(9) Jürgen Habermas, On the Pragmatics of Communication, MIT press 2000 (OPC)

Course Description
The course is designed to help the students study two closely related language-related areas of philosophical studies, that is, the well-established philosophy of language and the emerging philosophy of (linguistic) communication. Humans are essentially linguistic beings. We live, --perceive, feel, think, reason, will, act, and interact-- in and through human languages; we are linguistically and communicatively situated in the world. Ordinarily, we would believe that the speakers of a natural language understand, or know the meanings, of the expressions of that language and are able to communicate effectively with others speaking the same language. However, we all experience that, in real life, misunderstandings and communication breakdowns are rampant. Understanding the members of one’s own language community, even the members of one’s own family, can be taxing; understanding and communication across different language communities can seem all but impossible. To solve many difficult issues involved in language use, the philosophers of language have been attempting to provide a systematic account of the most essential aspect of language-use, namely, the linguistic meaning. In fact, philosophy of language is motivated in large part by a desire to give a systematic account of our intuitive notion of linguistic meaning and related aspects of language-use, especially linguistic understanding and communication. Traditionally, it includes, but is far from exhausted by, the following meaning-related questions:

- What is linguistic meaning? Are there so-called meaning at all? Are there facts about meaning?
- Suppose that certain linguistic expressions do have meanings. What is it for a linguistic expression to have the distinctive meaning it does? How does a linguistic expression mean what it does? What is
the meaning of such a linguistic expression? How do we know its meaning? What kinds of meaning a linguistic expression have? How are different kinds of meanings related? How does a person manage to use linguistic expressions with pre-established conventional meanings to convey unconventional intentions?

- How is linguistic understanding possible? What is it for a speaker to understand an expression or grasp its meaning? What counts as effective linguistic understanding? Given the diversity of languages embedded with different worldviews and ways of thinking, how is cross-language understanding possible?
- How is linguistic communication possible? How is linguistic understanding and communication related?
- What is the relationship between language, thought, and reality? How is language related to the world (metaphysics)? Does language create or shape reality, or does language reflects reality? How is language related to our thought (philosophy of mind)? Whether language is merely a means for expressing thoughts or is something that enables us to have thoughts and shapes the way we think?
- What is the nature of language? What kind of phenomena languages are? What is the primary role or function of language?

In this one-semester long seminar, for the part on the philosophy of language, we can only focus on four central issues: the theories of reference, the theories of meaning, pragmatics and speech acts, and cross-language understanding. Since our overall concern is with the question of how effective linguistic understanding and communication is possible, accordingly, the part on the philosophy of communication will examines a few well-known philosophical discourses or models of communication, including Locke’s transmission discourse, Gadamer’s hermeneutic discourse, and Habermas’ communicative-action discourse.

**Warning:** The philosophy of language as it is approached within the analytic tradition has a formidable reputation for difficulty. To many of you new to the subject, philosophy of language can seem bewilderingly complicated to comprehend. This is not an illusion, since philosophy of language deals with some of the most profound and difficult topics in any area of philosophy. I will try my best to make it accessible even to the students with minimal philosophical training. Of course, you are fully expected to make your best efforts to read and analyze each reading on your own. **Do not expect that you can understand my lectures and reading materials without reading them BEFORE each class.**

**Class format:** Our class will be proceeded in the format of seminar. That means that class time will be devoted to lecture-discussion, with emphasis on class discussion. Lectures will be devoted primarily to presenting some necessary background, indicating the main points to be understood in the reading, and asking / answering questions. *That is why it is essential for you to do the assigned readings faithfully and thoroughly before you come to each class.* Please feel free to interrupt me anytime in class if you suspect that you may miss something, disagree with something, or would like to share some insightful thought with us. Your comments and criticisms are always welcome and are an indispensable part of the success of our class.

**Course Objectives**

Upon completion of this course, the students are expected to fulfill the following objectives:
- Become acquainted with the primary works of the major thinkers in the philosophy of language (Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, Searle, Austin, Grice, Davidson, Kripke, Quine) and communication (Locke, Gadamer, and Habermas), and understand their positions on key philosophical issues that dominated in the analytic tradition in the 20th century, such as competing theories of meaning and reference, pragmatics and speech acts, and different models of linguistic understanding and communication.
- Develop facility in employing philosophical methods, terms, concepts, and arguments that they learn from the study of philosophical theories of language and communication in their own areas of concentration, especially for the students with interest in linguistics and communication.
• Further develop students’ ability of examining many of our own unconscious assumptions, biases, and some deeply embedded philosophical presuppositions underlying them through being exposed to the writings of philosophers who challenge the conventional wisdom of our times.
• Further sharpen students’ analytic and critical thinking skills necessary to conduct philosophical research and other areas of study.
• Help students further acquire a set of reading, writing, and oral discussion skills that will allow them to engage philosophical texts in depth.

Course Requirements
1. Attendance and participation (15 %)
   - Class attendance: class attendance is mandatory. I have all intentions this semester to enforce class attendance. You will lose 1 point (1 point out of your course grade of total 100 points) for each class you miss without a granted permission from me in advance (emergencies and sudden illness are the only exceptions; in such a case, you still need to my approval afterward).
   - Come to class on time (I mean before I come in): frequent tardiness will definitely affect your participation grade.
   - Class readings: You are strictly required to complete all of the assigned readings before each class. It is a good idea to take notes and raise questions as you read.
   - Active participation: you should be prepared to participate in all in-class activities, including answer questions, raise questions and concerns, make comments, and engage in class discussions.

2. Pop-quizzes and small group discussions (10 – 15 %)
   - There will be some pop quizzes at the very beginning of some classes on the reading assignments (just to keep you on your toes to make sure that you do the readings).
   - We will have many graded small-group discussions based on assigned questions in class.

3. Writing assignments (70 – 75 %)
   - Three (3) short essays (45 – 50 %): each should be 5-7 pages long (Time New Roman font 12, 1 inch margins, double-spaced with page numbers)
   - One term paper (25 %): about 10 to 12 pages long.

   ▪ Suggested topics and guidance for each writing assignment will be distributed later.
   ▪ Rewrite options: you could rewrite any of the three short essays. If you do choose to rewrite, each version will count as 50% of the grade for the essay. Rewrites will be accepted within 7 days after your graded essay is returned.
   ▪ For more information on philosophy writing, please refer to Philosophy department website http://departments.juniata.edu/philosophy/links.html for “How to write a philosophy paper” under Philosophy Research and Learning Tools.

Course Policies
1. Withdrawal: you can withdraw from the course at any time before or on the last day of classes, Tuesday, 5/7/2013 we both agree that it is in your best interest.
2. Learning Difference: the Americans Disabilities Act mandates accessibility in all aspects of the learning environment. If you have an identified disability and are in need of specific accommodations, please notify the Office of Academic Support Services and discuss your needs with me at the beginning of the semester.
3. Academic integrity: “The College considers academic integrity one of the foundation stones of a liberal arts education and asks all students to use good sense and judgment in preparing and submitting material for examination and evaluation. Particularly at mid-semester and semester's end, under work and deadline pressure, students may make false assumptions or uninformed decisions that could lead to a charge of academic dishonesty.” (from the provost office website)
4. Late essay penalty: you will lose 2 points (2 points out of 100 points) for each day your essay is late, including weekends and holidays.

Tentative Schedule (very ambitious)

Week 1 (1/22-24)
Tu: Course requirements and introduction       (1) Martinich, pp. 1-7, 18-23; (2) Lycan, pp. 1-3

Part I Historical Background: Locke and Frege on Language
1. John Locke’s Ideational Theory of Language
Th: (1) Locke, “Of words” (1690), in Martinich, pp. 621-5, 613-4; (2) Lycan, pp. 66-8; (3) Morris, “Locke and the nature of language” (from IPL, pp. 5-20, P drive)

Week 2 (1/29-31)
2. Gottlob Frege on Sense and Reference
Tu-Th: (1) Frege, “On sense and nominatum” (1892), in Martinich, pp. 217-29, 209-11, 29-31; (2) Morris, “Frege on sense and reference” (from IPL, pp. 21-48, P drive); (3) Lycan, pp. 10-12, 31-34

Week 3 (2/5-7)
3. Definite Descriptions
Tu: Introducing the referential theory of meaning Lycan, pp. 3-6 (three objections), 9-12 (four puzzles); Bertrand Russell’s description theory of definite descriptions (1) Russell, “On denoting” (1905), in Martinich, pp. 230-8; (2) Lycan, pp. 12-19; (3) Morris, “Russell on definite descriptions” (from IPL, pp. 49-61, P drive)

Week 4 (2/12-14)
4. Proper Names
Tu: The description theory (1) John Searle, “Proper names” (1958) (from RIPL, pp. 585-92, P drive); (2) Russell, “Descriptions” (1919), in Martinich, read pp. 242-3, 244, 280-1; (3) Lycan, pp. 31-43; (4) Morris, pp. 70-3
Th: Saul Kripke’s causal-historical theory (1) Kripke, “Naming and necessity” (1972), in Martinich, pp. 290-303; (2) Lycan, pp. 45-58; (3) Optional: Morris, “Kripke on proper names” (from IPL, pp. 74-93, P drive)

Week 5 (2/19-21)

Part III Theories of Meaning
5. The Traditional Entity-Theory of Meaning: meanings as mental or linguistic entities
Th: (1) Martinich, pp. 32-55; (2) Lycan, pp. 65-75; (3) Morris, “meaning as entities” (from IPL, pp. 175-9)

➢ Essay One on Frege and/or theories of reference (part I & II) due on 2/22 (Friday)
Week 6 (2/26-28)

6. Wittgensteinian Use-Theory of Meaning: meaning as use
Tu: (1) Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Meaning as use” (1953) (from PI, sections 1-23, P drive); (2) Lycan, pp. 76-84; (3) Morris, “Wittgenstein on Augustinian picture” (from IPL, pp. 292-9)

7. H.P. Grice’s Intention-Theory of Meaning: meaning as communicative intention
Th: (1) Grice, “Meaning” (1957), in Martinich, pp. 108-13; (2) Lycan, pp. 86-96; (3) Optional: Morris, “Grice on meaning” (from IPL, pp. 248-69, P drive)

Week 7 (3/5-7)

8. Donald Davidson’s Truth-Condition Theory of Meaning: meanings as truth-conditions

Week 8 (3/12-14) Spring Break!

Week 9 (3/19-21)

Part IV. Pragmatics and Speech Acts

9. Speech Acts and Illocutionary Force
Tu: J. L. Austin on speech acts   (1) Lycan, pp. 137-43; (2) Austin, “Performative utterances” (1961), in Martinich, pp. 136-45, 127-9; (3) Lycan, pp. 144-54; (4) Optional: Morris, “Austin on speech acts” (from IPL, pp. 231-47, P drive)


❐ Essay Two on theories of meaning (part III) due on 3/21 (Thursday)

Week 10 (3/26-28)

10. Implicative Relations
Tu: H.P. Grice on conversational implicatures   (1) Grice, “Logic and conversation” (1975), in Martinich, pp. 171-81, 131-5; (2) Lycan, pp. 156-63; (3) Mangion, “P. Grice and the theory of conversation” (from PAC, pp. 229-36, P drive)


Week 11 (4/2-4)

Tu: P. F. Strawson on presuppositions   (1) Strawson, sections 2 & 3 of “On referring” (1950), in Martinich, pp. 249-55; (2) Lycan, pp. 20-1, 163-6

Part V. Cross-Language Understanding and Communication

11. Cross-Language Understanding

Week 12 (4/9-11)


Essay Three on pragmatics and speech acts (part IV) due on 4/11 (Thursday)

Week 13 (4/16-18)
Tu: Donald Davidson on radical interpretation   (1) Davidson, “Radical interpretation” (1973) and commentary (from RPL, pp. 92-115)

Th: LAS, no class

Week 14 (4/23-25)

12. Discourses of Cross-Language Communication
Tu: Lockean transmission discourse   (1) Mangion, “Foucault on discourse” (from PAC, pp. 62-9, P drive); (2) Radford, “John Locke and the transmission model of communication” (from POC, pp. 14-35, P drive); (3) Optional: Wang, “the transmission model of cross-language communication” (from ICC, pp. 292-5, 297-9, P drive)


Week 15 (4/30-5/2)
Tu: Gadamer   Optional: (1) Wang, “hermeneutic understanding in abnormal discourse” (from ICC, pp. 260-72, P drive); (2) Wang, “Gadamer’s conversation model of communication” (from ICC, pp. 301-14, P drive)

Th: Habermas’s communicative-action discourse   (1) Jürgen Habermas, “What is universal pragmatics” (1976) (from OPC, pp. 21-104, P drive); (2) Mangion, “Habermas on communication and social theory” (from PAC, pp. 271-93, 299-303, P drive)

Week 16 (5/7)
Tu: Habermas   Optional: Wang, “Habermas’s discourse model of communication” (from ICC, pp. 315-34, P drive)

Term Paper on cross-language understanding & communication (part V) due on 5/9 (Thursday)