FACULTY OF ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

PHIL 671.01 – "Topics in Philosophical Logic and Philosophy of Language"
Topic #3: "Perspectives on Language"

Fall Term 2011

Course Outline

Meetings: 2:00-4:30pm Thursdays in PF 120
An additional meeting time for 671 students only will be arranged.

Instructor:	Dr. Nicole Wyatt
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Office Hours:	Monday 3:30-4:30pm, and by appointment

Course Description

> 'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less.' 'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean so many different things.' 'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master - that's all.'   — Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*, Chapter 6.

There are a variety of perspectives that philosophers have taken on language. Some treat language primarily as a quasi-mathematical system. On this view a language might be taken to be a function which assigns meanings to strings of signs or marks. The central task from this perspective is to describe that function. Others focus on language as something the users know—from this perspective the central task is to determine both what we know and how we come to know it. A third perspective focuses on language as a social phenomenon; as a dimension of human activity. Language, we might say, is something people do.

Some philosophers have taken these perspectives on language to be amenable to a synthesis. David Lewis claims that linguistic activity is the use of systems of the sort characterized by the first perspective. Other philosophers have suggested that what we know as language users is a set of rules that generate the system of the first perspective. But most philosophers of language work within one perspective almost exclusively, and some of them at least implicitly take the view that one perspective (theirs, naturally) is the correct perspective. Humpty Dumpty enters the fray on the side of conflict between the perspectives: language is something he does, and no rules or system can prevent him from meaning whatever he intends to mean. Who is to be master, if anyone?— this is the central question of the class. Are these perspectives compatible, and if not, does any of them have a claim to be the correct perspective for philosophers of language to take. Should we be pluralists or monists?

Required Texts

Soames, Scott. 2010. *Philosophy of Language.* Princeton University Press.
Stainton, Robert J. 2005. *Philosophical Perspectives on Language*. Broadview Press.
Stainton, Robert J. 2000. *Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language*. Broadview Press.
Supplemental readings provided through the Blackboard site for the course.

Evaluation

Grades in this class will be based on a term paper and the production of weekly comments on the readings. The weekly comments will be shared with the other members of the graduate seminar. There will be NO registrar scheduled final exam.

Due Dates

Weekly comments	TBA based on time of 671 only meeting
Term paper	Monday December 12th

Grading

- *Ceteris paribus*, the term paper will be worth 50%, and the weekly comments will be worth 50%.
- Later virtue will be allowed to redeem earlier sin.
- Grading will be based on both content *and* quality of presentation, which includes spelling and grammar.
- In computing your final grade, your marks on individual assignments will be converted to grade points as defined in the calendar (A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1, F = 0).

Late policy

The term paper will not be accepted after the deadline without special permission from the instructor. Failure to submit on time will normally result in a mark of zero. Students who cannot submit a paper due to medical reasons or other reasonable grounds should contact the instructor as soon as possible.

Website

In addition to the Blackboard site there is a wiki for the course which will be used for the production of class notes by students in philosophy 471. This can be found at https://language2011.wikispaces.com/ , however please note that you will not be able to access this site until you have been added as a user, which will happen after the official start of classes.

INTELLECTUAL HONESTY

Intellectual honesty is the cornerstone of the development and acquisition of knowledge and requires that the contribution of others be acknowledged. As a result, cheating or plagiarism on any assignment or examination is regarded as **an extremely serious academic offence**, the penalty for which may be an F on the assignment and possibly also an F in the course, academic probation, or requirement to withdraw. The University Calendar states that plagiarism exists when:

- *the work submitted or presented was done, in whole or in part, by an individual other than the one submitting or presenting the work (this includes having another impersonate the student or otherwise substituting the work of another for one's own in an examination or test;*
- *parts of the work are taken from another source without reference to the original author;*
- *the whole work (e.g., an essay) is copied from another source; and/or*
- *a student submits or presents work in one course which has also been submitted in another course (although it may be completely original with that student) without the knowledge of or prior agreement of the instructor involved.*

While it is recognized that scholarly work often involves reference to the ideas, data and conclusions of other scholars, intellectual honesty requires that such references be explicitly and clearly noted. Plagiarism occurs not only when direct quotations are taken from a source without specific acknowledgement, but also when original ideas or data from the source are not acknowledged. A bibliography is insufficient to establish which portions of the student's work are taken from external sources; footnotes or other recognized forms of citation must be used for this purpose.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION

It is the student's responsibility to request academic accommodation. If you are a student with a documented disability who may require academic accommodation and have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre, contact their office at 220-8237. Students who have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre are not eligible for formal academic accommodation. You are also required to discuss your needs with your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the start of this course.