Non-Paradigmatic Pragmatics*

How do we communicate? The dominant paradigm in the philosophy of language, built on the foundational work of H.P. Grice, David Lewis, and Robert Stalnaker, presents an elegant and powerful model. It views conversation as a cooperative, rational activity where speakers' intentions are recognized against a backdrop of transparently shared information, or "common ground."

This MA-level seminar takes this powerful paradigm as its starting point but focuses on its limits. Our central goal is to investigate "non-paradigmatic" forms of communication—those that strain or break the assumptions of the standard model. What happens when communication is not fully cooperative, or even adversarial? How can coordination be achieved without the rich, recursive mental states of classic common ground?

We will move from the foundational texts to current research, exploring a series of test cases:

- **Insinuation and Covert Speech:** How do we communicate things we don't want to go "on the record" for?
- **Communication without Common Ground:** Can we make sense of coordination in animal communication or interactions between strangers without appealing to a shared mental state?
- **Genre and Convention:** How do local conventions, from poetry to tweets, override the general principles of conversation?
- **Linguistic Style:** How does *how* we say something contribute to meaning, beyond the proposition asserted?
- **Large Language Models (LLMs):** What can our interactions with non-sentient partners like LLMs teach us about the nature of conversational alignment?

Through engagement with primary literature at the intersection of philosophy, linguistics, and cognitive science, students will develop a nuanced view of the complexities of communication and hone their ability to contribute to contemporary philosophical debates.