I. Administrivia

A. I am hoping to get the papers back to you with comments before the break.

B. December 10 is the pro-seminar conference. Jessica, Suzanne, and Jared will present. We need to assign commentators from PHL 880 and have one PHL 880 person volunteer to be session moderator/chair. I am thinking that if the PHL 800 students can get their revised papers to their commentator on December 1, that could give the commentators enough time to prepare a 5-10 minutes comment by December 8. Does this sound reasonable?

C. The next PD is next week, when Dean Chris Long will visit class. He will speak to managing your philosophical identities, and we’ll use 30 minutes to workshop your CVs. If you want to bring your current CV with you for that part, please do.

II. Ideas from the reading journals

A. Stalnaker

1. “Situating ‘common ground’ as background presuppositions seems to assume a passivity and philosophical incommensurability” among parties to the common ground (Ayanna)

2. If we take common ground to be common belief, are we essentializing? (Ayanna)

3. Stalnaker requires that common ground is a propositional attitude, and he considers casting it in terms of belief or acceptance; however, these seem too strong, since we can achieve interpretation with interlocutors when we believe or accept nothing they believe or accept. We can identify “background presupposition/belief” without sharing that belief. (Suzanne)

4. “Is it really true that common ground is a propositional attitude? Or could it be some other kind of attitude?” (Bethany)
5. The definition of common ground on p. 17 would appear to be “auto poetic”, in the sense that “as soon as everyone believes phi is common ground, it is common ground” (Bethany)

6. Does a shared language belong to the common ground of two interlocutors? Is this something that falls within the scope of belief, or is it part of the common ground without having to be believed? It seems odd to say that this is something believed. (Jared)

7. “What is it for all members of a community to accept Φ?” (Youjin)

B. Clark

1. “Perhaps what allows joint actions and communication is not common ground per se, but the assumption that there is common/mutual ground between us/communicators → is such assumption also common ground?” (Youjin)

2. “Is there really a consensus among members of a cultural community? Or is it just assumed that there is a consensus?”

3. Concern about the prospect of radical subjectivism should incline someone who, like Clark, favors common ground for joint action in general to embrace interpretation over translation as the goal of communication. (Jared)

4. Can the acceptance/belief distinction be incorporated into the CG-shared or CG-reflexive models of common ground? (Bethany)

5. What is at stake with the three different representations of common ground? (Bethany)

6. If the ineffable is included in common ground, doesn’t that preclude the possibility that common ground is a propositional attitude? (Bethany)

7. Coercion is compatible with common ground – the shared basis principle does not rule it out (Suzanne)

8. “People can also covertly signal membership in a community through shade, coded language, dog whistles, etc.” (Suzanne)

9. “What might a structural account of ‘reflexive common ground’ entail?” (Ayanna)

10. If information isn’t just propositional, what impact does that have on this account? (Or Stalnaker’s account?) (Ayanna)

11. What is the role of time in Clark’s account of common ground? (Ayanna)
III. Thoughts on the readings

A. How do these readings help us think about communication?

1. If you think of communication as *making common*, then common ground as a metaphor works to capture what we aim to achieve in communication

   a. Stalnaker introduces it in a discussion of *sentence presupposition*, which is typically taken to be communicated in some fashion by the use of sentences; common ground plays an *explanatory* role in many theories of common ground

   b. Clark acknowledges the idea that we can build and maintain this – one might even maintain that communication is an active process of bringing people into social connection, *on the positive assumption that communication is attraction and not repulsion*

2. Stalnaker and Clark focus on linguistic communication, understood as aiming at something like *mutual understanding*.

   a. Verbal communication is (often) a kind of joint action that requires coordination among participants; common ground as a construct is introduced to represent what is required for coordination to be possible

   b. This explains the cognitivist tendencies in the views – the idea that this should be explained in terms of our psychological attitudes as opposed to the *real* ground on which we stand when we speak

B. Philosophical issues

1. Stalnaker

   a. This supplies a very narrow understanding of what CG involves

      i. A *cognitivist* view that requires mutual belief, or at least mutual acceptance

      ii. Can we expand the notion as it is introduced in this paper into a more robust notion of common ground?

   b. Presupposition is a propositional attitude

      i. A subject’s presuppositions are their beliefs about common beliefs, according to Stalnaker
ii. Stalnaker’s approach involves seeing the pragmatic, accommodation story as a new description of the phenomena to be explained, and so he rejects the “relation X” approach to sentential presupposition (713). The phenomena to be explained should be understood in terms of “what speakers tend to take to be common ground when they use certain expressions, or what can normally be inferred about the common ground from the use of certain expressions, and then try to explain … why the phenomena are as they are” (713). The explanation could involve use of the semantic approach combined with Gricean machinery.

2. Clark

a. Classifying by community can also be for the purpose of identifying important differences that we have with members of other communities; this can suborn oppression and injustice

b. This perhaps relates to the principle of charity that you find in someone like Davidson

   i. Attribute to your interlocutors true beliefs about the world (and perhaps cooperative intentions) until you are forced to give that assumption up.

   ii. Conversational principle: innocent until proven guilty

iii. But is this in general true?

c. CG as a form of self-awareness – what does this mean? CG might require self-awareness, but that even seems too strong.

   i. Often we talk without a thought to this, thinking that because we think $x$, others must think $x$. In fact, though, it would appear that the presumption of commonality is what motivates and underpins much of our actual communication

   ii. This amount to promoting the false consensus effect into more prominence as a part of how we roll in conversation

C. How does this contribute to our group paper?

1. What is it to take X for granted? How does this figure into CG and how does it underwrite oppression, injustice, etc.? Is it avoidable?

2. It seems to me that we may want to limit our understanding of CG to situations in which we are focused on linguistic interactions – here we can pause to examine microagressions and phenomena like dog-whistling
3. I think it is very important that we reflect on the fact that all isn’t hunky dory in much communication – witness the tragic events of last Tuesday and the fallout; yet even though it isn’t always about being together, we nevertheless communication (or do we?)

4. Accommodation is a key process in all of this, and should probably figure centrally into our discussion