Philosophy of Psychology

PHIL11089

Course lecturer: Dr. Jane Suilin Lavelle
Course organizer: Dr. Matthew Nudds
Semester One 2011
Philosophy of Psychology

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Course description
This course covers some of the most important issues in the philosophy of psychology. We will be looking at questions such as:

- What is the structure and organization of the human mind?
- Does thought have a linguistic structure?
- Which of our cognitive capacities are innate and which are learned?
- What does it mean for something to be innate?
- What is the role of the emotions in our cognition?
- Does cognition happen solely in the brain, or can we usefully understand it as 'extended' to include the body and environment?

Contact
The formal organiser for this course is Matthew Nudds (matthew.nudds@ed.ac.uk). However, your first point of contact should be the lecturer for this course, who is Suilin Lavelle (j.s.lavelle@ed.ac.uk).

Seminars
Seminars will be held on Thursdays 9 – 10:50 in the Dugald Stewart building, room G.06.

Office hours
My office hours are Wednesdays, 10am – 12pm. This is a good time for you to come and discuss ideas for your essays. Please don’t think you need a ‘problem’ to come to office hours; I am always willing to use this time to chat through any thoughts you may be having about topics covered in the course.

Assessment details
This course will be assessed through a weekly participation grade (20%) and a final essay of 2,500 (80%). It is up to you to choose your essay topic and title. Your essay title needs to be approved by me.
Your weekly participation grade will be awarded according to three criteria:

1. **Oral presentation.**

   Each week I will ask two people to give an informal oral summary of the week’s reading. You will not be told in advance who will be giving the presentation.

2. **WebCT contribution.**

   There will be discussion forums on WebCT for discussing the topic of the week. You must contribute each week to this online discussion, and your post must be online 24 hours before the lecture (i.e., by 9 am on Wednesday). Contributions could consist in a question or confusion about the reading (with some explanation as to why you are confused), an answer to another student’s question, or posting of a research article with a brief commentary about why you think it’s of relevance to the week’s topic. You MUST post something each week. This is MANDATORY.

3. **Class contribution**

   Students are expected to participate in class discussion, and their participation grade will take this into account.

Before beginning your long essay, it is recommended that you read the following:

- James Prior ‘How to write a philosophy essay’. Available online: [http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html](http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html)

**Referencing**

A clear referencing system is essential for any good essay. As this is a relatively easy thing to achieve, there should be no excuse for poor referencing.

**Quotations**

Quotations must be accompanied by the author, date and page number. E.g.

‘Mirror neuron activation can easily be interpreted as part of the neuronal processes that underlie social perception.’ (Gallagher, 2008a, p. 541)

Some of the articles we use are pre-prints. When possible, use the page number from the actual publication (if this is a journal article, then you can find it online). If this is not possible, then write ‘quote’ (forthcoming) or ‘quote’ (on-line source).

**Bibliography**

References should be in alphabetical order by author, and, if there is more than one entry for an author, in date order for that author (using ‘a’, ‘b’ etc, if there is more than a single reference for that author in a given year). Below are some examples of different types of reference.


Please note: do not use the format of the course readings below as your template for the bibliography, as I’ve collated them from different sources so they are not uniform. In other words, do as I say, and not as I do...

**Coursework deadlines**

The date for the submission of the final essay is Thursday 15th December 2011, by 4pm.

**Plagiarism**

It is plagiarism to present the written work of an author or of another student as your own. In any essay or exam answer submitted for assessment, all passages taken from other people’s work (including handouts), either word for word, or with small changes, must be placed within quotation marks, with specific reference to author, title and page. No excuse can be accepted for any failure to do so, nor will inclusion of the source in a bibliography be considered an adequate acknowledgement. Likewise, whenever material is paraphrased, this must be indicated by specific reference and acknowledgement. Credit should also be given for the use of someone else’s ideas.

If the marker decides that plagiarism has occurred, the student may be judged to have failed the essay and/or exam and/or module (depending on the degree of severity). The plagiarism will also be recorded on the student’s permanent record.

Note that the University has the resources to check any student's essay against an international electronic database, to detect whether any part of the essay reproduces either another student's work—even a student from another university—or work available on the internet.
**Syllabus**

The shaping question of the course is this: how should we understand the nature of our cognitive processes? Throughout the semester we will be looking at different answers which philosophers have given to this question.

| 1. Personal and sub-personal explanation |
| 2. Mechanistic explanation in psychology |
| 3. The computational/representational theory of mind |
| 4. Tacit knowledge and tacit theories |
| 5. Can infants and animals think? |
| 6. The Nativism/Empiricism debate |
| 7. The modularity of mind and evolutionary psychology |
| 8. Dual systems theories |
| 9. Folk psychology |
| 10. Delusions and schizophrenia |
| 11. Emotions and cognition |
| 12. Embodied cognition |

**Week One: Personal and Sub-personal explanation**

In giving a personal-level explanation of behaviour we treat the person as an intentional agent, and we make sense of their behaviour in terms of reasons. Sub-personal explanations by contrast are concerned with underlying mechanisms that might explain how personal-level explanations could be true. These mechanisms might be computational, information-processing mechanisms or they might be neurophysiological mechanisms. Can these distinct types of explanations and the theories that underpin these explanations be integrated or are they radically incommensurable types of explanation? Some philosophers such as John McDowell, Jennifer Hornsby and Donald Davidson have defended the view that personal and sub-personal level explanations are incommensurable, and can’t be made to mesh. Proponents of functionalism such as Daniel Dennett have argued that these explanations can be made to fit together into a single unified theory of mind.

**Class readings**


J. Hornsby “Physicalist thinking and conceptions of behaviour” In Bermudez (Ed) *Philosophy of Psychology: contemporary readings*.

**Other readings**

J. Bermudez *Philosophy of Psychology: a contemporary introduction*, ch.2 (Routledge, 2005)

D. Davidson “Psychology as Philosophy” In Bermudez (Ed)
Week 2 Mechanistic Explanation in Psychology

Scientific explanation is often taken to be the subsumption of an individual event under a law of nature. Individual events are explained by deducing them from laws together with initial conditions, and laws are explained by deducing them from more fundamental laws. In psychology laws are conceived of as effects (e.g. the McGurk effect) and are what psychologists set about explaining, they are not what does the explaining (Cummins 2006). Cummins tells that the primary target of explanation in psychology are capacities (e.g. the capacity to see depth, learn language etc.) How are capacities explained? We will explore some recent work in philosophy of science that suggests that psychological capacities are explained in terms of mechanisms Machamer et al (2000) define mechanisms as “entities and activities organised such that they are productive of regular changes from start of set up conditions to finish or termination conditions” (p.3). Mechanistic explanation breaks-down a psychological capacity into sub-capacities. The psychological capacity is explained in terms of components and their interaction, each of which is carrying out a sub-capacity. In this session we will look at whether psychological explanation might be taken to be a kind of mechanistic explanation, and consider the implications that such an understanding of psychological explanation has for the relationship between personal and sub-personal level explanation.

Class readings


Available on WebCT.

Secondary readings


J. Bermudez Philosophy of Psychology: a contemporary introduction, ch.3 (Routledge, 2005)

D. Lewis “Reduction of Mind.” reprinted in Bermudez & Macpherson (Ed’s)

Week Three: Computational and representational theories of mind
One of the most influential accounts of cognition is Fodor’s computational mind, coupled with his ‘language of thought’ hypothesis. Fodor claims that by understanding our cognitive processes as computational, we can explain human reasoning and inferential processes. Contained within our minds are representations of the world which can be cognitively integrated into reasoning processes. In this seminar we examine the computational theory of mind and the language of thought hypothesis.

**Class readings**


**Secondary reading**


**Week 4: Tacit knowledge and theories in cognitive processes**

Many philosophers and psychologists have maintained that our cognitive processes are underpinned by various theories. This seems an odd claim to make: in what way could neural firings be understood to be theory-like? How do these cognitive processes resemble scientific theories, or other theories as we know them? Furthermore, philosophers like Stich and Fodor maintain that cognitive processes draw on tacit knowledge. What does it mean to say that we know something tacitly, and how can we tell if we have such knowledge if it is tacit? In this seminar we will look at the foundations for the claim that some of our cognitive abilities are subserved by theories, and compare this with the mechanistic types of explanation discussed in the previous seminar.

**Class readings**


**Secondary readings**


**Week five : Can infants and animals think?**

In examining what our cognitive processes are like, it is useful to compare our mature capacity for thought with those of infants and animals. In looking at the cognitive capacities of pre-/non-linguistic creatures, we can get a better grip on the role language plays in thought, and also consider what kind of architecture is required to provide the kinds of cognitive processes that are unique to our species.

**Class Readings**


**Secondary Reading**


Week six: The Nativism/Empiricism debate

Many philosophers and psychologists believe that a lot of our cognitive capacities are innate. This has important implications for our understand of human cognitive development, both ontogenetically (within the individual) and phylogenetically (as a species). In this seminar we will look at what it means for some capacity to be innate, and how this concept influences cognitive science.

Class Readings


Secondary Reading


Week seven: The modularity of mind and evolutionary psychology.

Whatever the architecture of our mind turns out to be, it must have some kind of plausible evolutionary story. The field of evolutionary psychology aims to give evolutionarily plausible stories for our current cognitive capacities. One particular view of how the mind is structured – the ‘Modularity’ view – has been of particular interest to evolutionary psychologists, as both proponents and opponents of Modularity draw on arguments from evolutionary pressures to support their claims.
Class Reading


Secondary Reading

Buller, D. & Hardcastle, V. “Evolutionary psychology, Meet Developmental Neuobiology: Against Promiscuous Modularity" Brain and Mind 1: 307-25


Week eight: Dual systems theories

Some recent theories in the psychology of reasoning, and in social psychology have posited two isolatable cognitive systems or processes. Are these theories talking about the same thing? What is the status of these theories? Can they help us understand problematic cognitive phenomena such as delusion and self-deception? Is it helpful or overly simplistic to separate things in this way?

Class Readings


Secondary Reading

Peter Carruthers (2009) An architecture for dual reasoning. In J. Evans and K. Frankish (Eds), In Two Minds: dual processes and beyond. Oxford University Press. [all papers in this volume are relevant]
Week nine: Folk psychology

How do the cognitive processes we have been looking at map onto our everyday notion of psychological terms (folk psychology)? Do our terms 'belief', 'desire', 'hope', 'wish' map onto anything in the brain, or are they simply instrumental?

Class Reading


Secondary Reading


Week ten: Embodied Cognition

The views of cognition we have so far examined can all be broadly described as ‘computationalist’ views of cognition. ‘Embodied Cognition’ challenges this paradigm. This seminar examines Embodied Cognition, looking at its distinctive features and asking how different it is from the standard computationalist view.

Class reading

Shapiro, L. (2010). Embodied Cognition. Routledge. chapters 2 and 3. [on reserve in main library; also available from 7 George Sq].

Secondary Reading
Traditionally cognitive processes have been thought of as part of the ‘reason’ process, whereas emotions are irrational and interfere with reason (just think of all the novels which have this as a theme, e.g. ‘Sense and Sensibility’). However, recent research suggests that our emotions play an important role in reason and decision making processes, and that we should no longer draw a divide between ‘rational’ reason and ‘irrational’ emotions. In this seminar we look at one particular account of how emotions affect decision making: Damasio’s Somatic marker hypothesis.

**Class Readings**


http://bjps.oxfordjournals.org/content/59/1/51.full

**Secondary reading:**


http://www.mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk/research/emotion/cemhp/documents/dunnsmhreview.pdf


Extensions

Students are expected to monitor their workload, be aware of all deadlines and be able to organise themselves accordingly.

Extension requests should be submitted before the submission deadline. They must be submitted to the Teaching Office for approval, and must include details of the assessment(s) affected and length of extension requested, together with supporting evidence if required.

Other than in exceptional circumstances, extensions will only be granted in cases of illness or family emergency. If students are seeking extensions for more than one week, they must provide medical evidence and/or discuss the request with the Student Support Officer. Extension requests due to time mismanagement, personal computing/printing problems or ignorance of deadline will not be accepted.

The Teaching Office will email the student to tell them whether the extension has been granted. The decision conveyed in this email is final; if students feel that they have been unfairly denied an extension they should make a case to the special circumstances committee for the removal of late submission penalties at the examination board.

Retrospective extensions will not be granted. However, late submission penalties may be waived if a student requests an extension on the day of the submission deadline but cannot get medical evidence until some days later.

Extensions include weekends and University holidays. If an extended deadline falls on a weekend, the work should be submitted by 9:30am on the next working day (i.e., work which would be due at 4pm on Saturday due to an extension should be submitted by 9:30am on the following Monday).

Students with Adjustment Schedules. Extension requests from students with adjustment schedules that allow ‘short notice extensions’ will be treated sympathetically where possible. Students should however be prepared to give a reason for the extension request; simply citing an adjustment schedule is not an adequate reason. If students are seeking extensions for more than one week, they must provide medical evidence and/or discuss the request with the Student Support Officer.

Special Circumstances. Students may apply for consideration of special circumstances if they feel that events out with their control have resulted in poor exam performance in comparison to their previous coursework record or even missing an exam. These circumstances most commonly include illness or bereavement but can be submitted for a variety of issues. It is the student’s responsibility to complete a Special Circumstances form giving as much detail as possible and providing supporting evidence. All submissions must be accompanied by medical or other documentation.

PLEASE NOTE THAT WEEK 6, SEMESTER 2, IS INNOVATIVE LEARNING WEEK.