

Social Cognition (PHIL10131)

Spring 2019 Course Guide

People

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Course aims and objectives

This course examines the question of how we understand other people's behaviour. It considers different philosophical theories concerning how we attribute mental states to others, and discusses related questions such as whether this ability is unique to the human species, and whether it is innate. It will also examine the relation between social cognition and further issues such as our knowledge of our own minds. The course is strongly interdisciplinary, and will draw on sources from developmental psychology, neuroscience and anthropology, to support philosophical arguments.

Intended learning outcomes

On completion of this course, students will be able to demonstrate:

- Knowledge about the current philosophical debates concerning our ability to attribute mental states to others
- Understanding of some of the primary methodologies used in current cognitive science
- Knowledge of key empirical findings in the field of social cognition, and an understanding of how they can be used to critique philosophical arguments in this area
- The ability to bring analytic and critical skills to bear on texts in both philosophy and psychology

Students will also develop the following transferable skills:

- The ability to present complex ideas in a concise and clear manner in both oral and written work.
- Analytic and critical skills
- The development of research skills, such as using library and online resources

Teaching and learning

This course will comprise of pre-recorded lectures and a 2 hour weekly seminar (time and location TBC). Further, students will take turns to introduce one of the seminars with a short

presentation. This will consist of a summary of the paper in question and several suggestions for discussion.

Syllabus

Week 1: Introduction and Folk psychology

Week 2: Theory-theory

Week 3: Simulation theory

Week 4: Mirror neurons

Week 5: Can infants mindread?

Week 6: Cross-cultural variations in theories of mind

Week 7: Altruism in non-human animals

Week 8: Confabulation

Week 9: Social cognition and knowledge of our own minds: asymmetric accounts

Week 10: Social cognition and knowledge of our own minds: symmetric accounts

Week 11: Pedagogy and revision

General background reading

- Apperly, I.A. What is “theory of mind”? Concepts, cognitive processes and individual differences. *The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 65 pp. 825-839.
- Carruthers, Peter (2006) *The Architecture of the Mind*. Oxford University Press. Chapter one. [This gives useful background regarding modularity].
- **Lavelle, J.S. (2019). *The Social Mind: A Philosophical Introduction*. Taylor and Francis. [This is the core textbook for the class].**
- Spaulding, S. (2018). *How We Understand Others: Philosophy and Social Cognition*. Routledge.
- Zawidzki, Tadeusz (2013). *Mindshaping: a new framework for understanding human social cognition*. The MIT Press.

Week 1: Introduction and Folk Psychology

Welcome to Advanced Philosophy of Mind and Cognition! The course will focus on how we think about other minds (and how this relates to the way in which we think about our own mind). This session will introduce the topic of social cognition and examine a foundational idea that sets the scene for further debates in the field: folk psychology.

Class reading:

- Stich, S. & Ravenscroft, I. (1994). What is folk psychology? *Cognition*, 50, 447 – 468.
- Lavelle, J.S. (2019). *The Social Mind: A Philosophical Introduction*. Taylor and Francis. Introduction and chapter two.

Secondary Reading:

- Churchland, P. (1981). “Eliminative Materialism & Propositional Attitudes” *Journal of Philosophy*, 78.2, pp. 67-90.

- Horgan, T. & Woodward, J. (1985). "Folk Psychology is Here to Stay" *Philosophical Review*, 94.2, pp. 197-226.
- McGeer, V. (2007). The Regulative Dimension of Folk Psychology. In Daniel D. Hutto & Matthew Ratcliffe (eds.), *Folk Psychology Re-Assessed*. Kluwer/Springer Press. pp. 137—156

Week 2: Theory-theory

Weeks 2-5 will introduce the main theories concerning how we understand other people's behaviour. This seminar looks at how *Theory-theorists* answer this question. Theory-theorists maintain that we need a *theory of mind* in order to grasp mental state terms. We therefore need to have sufficient grasp of this theory in order to attribute mental states to others. In this class we examine the view that this theory is pre-dominantly learned, later in the course we will consider more nativist accounts.

Class Readings:

- Wellman, Henry M. (1992). *Child's Theory of Mind*. M.I.T. Press. Chapters 1 and 4.

Secondary Readings (many of these are useful for further weeks as well):

- Baron-Cohen, S. (1995). *Mindblindness: an essay on autism and theory of mind*. MIT Press.
- Gopnik, A., & Wellman, H. (1992). Why the child's theory of mind really is a theory. *Mind and Language*, 7, 145-71
- Gopnik, A. (1996). The scientist as child. *Philosophy of science*, 63, 485 - 514.
- Lavelle, J.S. (2019). *The Social Mind: A Philosophical Introduction*. Taylor and Francis. Chapter 4.
- Nichols, S., & Stich, S. (2003). *Mindreading*. Oxford University Press. Ch. 2.
- Premack, D., & Woodruff, G. (1978). Does the chimpanzee have a theory of mind? *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 1, 515 - 26.
- Sober, E. (2000). Evolution and the problem of other minds. *Journal of Philosophy*, 97, 365 – 386.

Week 3: Simulation theory

In this week we look at the earliest challenger to the *Theory-theory* in the form of *Simulation theory*. Simulation theorists think that we attribute mental states to others by 'putting ourselves in their shoes', using the mechanisms which generate our own emotional responses and mental states to 'simulate' the situation of the other person.

Class readings:

- Goldman, A. (2006). *Simulating Minds*. Oxford University Press. **Ch. 2**. Available as an E-book

Secondary readings:

- Davies, M., & Stone, T. (1998). Folk psychology and mental simulation. In A. O'Hear (Ed.), *Contemporary Issues in the Philosophy of Mind* (pp. 53-82). Cambridge University Press.
- Davies, M., & Stone, T. (2001). Mental simulation, tacit theory, and the threat of collapse. *Philosophical Topics* (pp. 127-174).
- Gallese, V., & Goldman, A. (1998). Mirror neurons and the simulation theory of mindreading. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 2, 493-501.
- Goldman, A. (1989). Interpretation Psychologized. *Mind and Language*, 4, 161 - 185.
- Lavelle, J.S. (2019). *The Social Mind: A Philosophical Introduction*. Taylor and Francis. Chapter 5.
- Stich, S., & Nichols, S. (1993). Folk psychology: Simulation or tacit theory? *Philosophical Issues*, 3, 225
- Saxe, R. (2005). Against Simulation: the argument from error. *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 9, 174 - 179

Week 4: The direct perception of mental states and mirror neurons

As saw in the previous week's seminar, Simulation theorists have appealed to neuroscience in support of their claims. Mirror neurons are a group of neurons which are active both when we engage in actions and when we perceive those actions in others. But how should we interpret these data? In this seminar we will examine the role of mirror neurons in different theories of social cognition, focussing on Vittorio Gallese and Shaun Gallagher's claim that the discharge of mirror neurons somehow enables us to 'directly perceive' mental states. We will also look at theories which give mirror neurons a less explanatory and more predictive role.

Class reading:

- Gallagher, S. (2008). Direct perception in the intersubjective context. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 17(2), pp. 535-543

Secondary reading:

- Calvo-Merino, B., Glaser, D., Grèzes, J., Passingham, R., & Haggard, P. (2005). Action observation and acquired motor skills: an fMRI study with expert dancers. *Cerebral Cortex*, 15, 1243-1249.
- Csibra, G. (2005, January 2). *Mirror neurons and action observation. Is simulation involved?* Retrieved from <http://www.interdisciplines.org/mirror/> [<http://www.cbcd.bbk.ac.uk/people/scientificstaff/gergo/pub/index.html/pub/mirror.pdf>]
- Gallagher, S. (2001). The practice of mind: theory, simulation or primary interaction? *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 8, 83-108.
- Gallese, V. (2002). Before and below 'theory of mind': embodied simulation and the neural correlates of social cognition. *Philosophical transactions of the royal society of the biological sciences*, 362, 659 – 669.
- Lavelle, J. S. (2012). Theory-theory and the direct perception of mental states. *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, 3, 213 – 230.
- Lavelle, J.S. (2019). *The Social Mind: A Philosophical Introduction*. Taylor and Francis. Chapter 6.
- Spaulding, S. (2013) Mirror neurons and social cognition. *Mind & Language* 28, 233-257.

Week 5: Can infants mindread?

There is a lively debate in cognitive science about how best to explain the 'gap' between young infants (6 – 15 months) ability to pass non-verbal false belief tasks and older children's (3-4years) failure in verbal versions of the task. This leads Apperly and Butterfill to endorse the 'two systems' account of mindreading.

Class reading:

- Apperly, I. & Butterfill, S. (2009) Do humans have two systems to track beliefs and belief-like states? *Psychological Review*, 116, pp.953 – 970

Secondary reading:

- Butterfill, S. & Apperly, I. (2011). How to construct a minimal theory of mind. *Mind and Language*, 28, 606 – 637.
- Baillargeon, R., Scott, R., & He, Z. (2010). False belief understanding in infants. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 14, 110 - 118.
- Carruthers, P. (2013). Mindreading in infancy. *Mind & Language* 28, 141-172.

- Csibra, G., & Southgate, V. (2006). Evidence for infants' understanding of false beliefs should not be dismissed. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 10, 4-5.
- Gergely, G., Bekkering, H., & Király, I. (2002). Rational imitation in preverbal infants. *Nature*, 415, 755.
- Lavelle, J.S. (2019). *The Social Mind*. Chapter 7.
- Southgate, V., & Vermetti, A. (2014). Belief-based action prediction in preverbal infants. *Cognition*, 130, 1-10.

Week 6: Cross-cultural variations in theories of mind

In the late 90's and early 2000's, researchers in developmental psychology began to question the premise that we understand other people's behaviour (primarily) by attributing mental states to them. Perhaps this is simply an artefact of a Western culture, where most of these experiments are carried out, with its focus on the individual. Cross-cultural studies started to take place contrasting the behaviour of participants from East Asian societies (traditionally believed to have a strong 'collectivist' ethic) and Western societies. Anthropologists also studied belief attribution in traditional societies. The results, as we will see, are a mixed bag. But they promise to shed light on which parts of our social cognition are innate, and which may be affected by the culture in which we grow up.

Class reading:

- Henrich, J., Heine, S., & Norenzayan, A. (2010). The weirdest people in the world? *Brain and Behavioural Science*, 33, 61 – 83.
- Lavelle, J.S. (2017). Cross-cultural considerations in social cognition. In J. Kiverstein (Ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of the Social Mind*. Routledge

Secondary reading:

- Barrett, H., Broesch, T., Scott, R., He, Z., Baillargeon, R., Wu, D., et al. (2013). Early false-belief understanding in traditional non-Western societies. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, 280, 1-5.
- Callaghan, T., Rochat, P., Lillard, A. et al. (2005). Synchrony in the onset of mental state reasoning. *Psychological Science*, 16, 378 – 384.
- Lillard, A. (1999). Developing a cultural theory of mind: The CIAO approach. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 8, 57-61
- Norenzayan, A., & Heine, S. J. (2005). Psychological universals: What are they and how can we know? *Psychological bulletin*, 131(5), 763.

- Prinz, Jesse (2011). Culture and Cognitive Science (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)
- Wellman, H. M., Fang, F., Liu, D., Zhu, L., & Liu, G. (2006). Scaling of theory-of-mind understandings in Chinese children. *Psychological Science*, 17, 1075-1081.
- Conference proceedings (2011): 'Toward an Anthropological Theory of Mind' *Suomen Anthropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society*, 36(4)

Week 7: Altruism in non-human animals

Helping others requires being able to know what they need. But how close is the relation between social cognition and altruistic behaviour? What *does* altruistic behaviour even consist in? In this seminar we will look at how philosophers have conceived of the altruism/egoism debate, including the important distinctions between *ethical egoism*, *psychological egoism*, and *evolutionary egoism*. We then turn to the question of whether the ability to attribute goals to others, and whether altruistic behaviour exists in species other than our own. We will look at the recent work of the psychologist Frans de Waal, as well as more traditional philosophical accounts of altruistic behaviour.

Class Reading

- De Waal, F. (2009). *Primates and Philosophers*. Princeton University Press. *Electronic resource*. **Part 1, pp.1-58** (they are very small pages!) The commentaries at the end are useful secondary reading.

Secondary Reading

- Batson, C.D. (2011). *Altruism in Humans*. Oxford University Press
- Blackburn, S. (1998). *Ruling Passions*. Oxford University Press. **Ch.5**
- Broad, C.D. (1930/1934). *Five Types of Ethical Theory*. K. Paul, Trench, Trubner. **Ch.3**.
- Butler, J. (1726). *Sermon XI. Upon the love of our neighbour*. Available through Project Guttenberg.
- Sterelney, K. & Griffiths, P. *Sex and Death*. University of Chicago Press. **Ch.8**
- Warneken, F., Hare, B., Melis, A., Hanus, D., & Tomasello, M. (2007). Spontaneous altruism by chimpanzees and young children. *PLoS Biology*, 5, 1414

Week 8: Confabulation

The course so far has mostly examined how subjects learn of other's mental states (although simulation theory made important reference to our capacity to learn of our own). Over the next three weeks we will consider the relations between social cognition and self-knowledge.

Week 8 focuses on confabulation. Roughly, ‘confabulation’ is the phenomenon whereby subjects form false post-hoc beliefs explaining their attitudes and actions. We will examine how best to categorise confabulation, before considering how to explain it. Specifically, we will consider whether the failures in self-knowledge in such cases are profoundly social: do subjects make mistakes because they are motivated to please their interlocutors?

Class readings:

- Nisbett, R. E., & Wilson, T. D. (1977). Telling more than we can know: Verbal reports on mental processes. *Psychological Review*, 84(3), 231–259.
- Hirstein, W. (2005). *Brain fiction: Self-deception and the riddle of confabulation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press (ch.1)

Secondary readings:

- Bortolotti, L., & Cox, R. E. (2009). ‘Faultless’ ignorance: Strengths and limitations of epistemic definitions of confabulation. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 18(4), 952–965.
- Carruthers, P. (2013). *The opacity of mind: An integrative theory of self-knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (ch. 11)
- Cox, R. (2018). Knowing why. *Mind & Language*, 33(2), 177–197
- Hirstein, W. (2009). Confabulation. In T. Bayne, A. Cleermans, & P. Wilken (Eds.), *The Oxford companion to consciousness* (pp. 174–177). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lopes, D. M. (2014). Feckless reason. In G. Currie, M. Kieran, A. Meskin, & J. Robson (Eds.), *Aesthetics and the sciences of mind* (pp. 21–36). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Keeling, Sophie. (2018). Confabulation and rational obligations for self-knowledge, *Philosophical Psychology*, 31(8) pp.1215-1238.
- Sullivan-Bissett, E. (2015). Implicit bias, confabulation, and epistemic innocence *Consciousness and Cognition*, 33, pp.548–560.

Week 9: Social cognition and knowledge of our own minds: asymmetric accounts

Social cognition is often held to importantly differ from subjects’ knowledge of their own minds, both in terms of the mechanism by which such ascriptions are formed and how they are justified. We might think that subjects have a special mode of access to their own minds which others lack. Indeed, this may also form the basis of our account of social cognition.

Class readings:

- Gertler, B. (2015) Self-Knowledge, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available here: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/self-knowledge/>
- Nichols, S. and S.P. Stich (2003). *Mindreading: An Integrated Account of Pretence, Self-Awareness, and Understanding Other Minds*, Ch.4 – ‘Reading One’s Own Mind’

Secondary readings:

- Armstrong, D.M. (1968/1994). “Introspection” in *Self-Knowledge* (ed. Q. Cassam). Oxford University press. Also available as pp. 323-7, 333-8 of Armstrong’s *A Materialist Theory of Mind*. Routledge.
- Gertler, B. (2011). *Self-Knowledge*. Routledge.
- Goldman A. I. (2006). *Simulating Minds: The Philosophy, Psychology, and Neuroscience of Mindreading*. Oxford University Press, Ch. 9.
- Carruthers, P. (2013). *The Opacity of Mind: An Integrative Theory of Self-Knowledge*. Oxford University Press, Ch. 7.
- Moran, R. (2001). *Authority and Estrangement: An Essay on Self-Knowledge*. Princeton UP. And for helpful exegesis, Gertler (2011). §2.5, Ch. 6.

Week 10: Social cognition and knowledge of our own minds: symmetric accounts

This week considers objections to the view discussed in week 9. Here we will examine the contention that self-knowledge importantly resembles our knowledge of other people’s minds – both are acquired and justified in the same way.

Class readings:

- Carruthers, P. (2010). Introspection: Divided and Partly Eliminated. *Philosophical and Phenomenological Research* 80, p.76–111.

Secondary readings:

- Carruthers, P. (2013). *The Opacity of Mind: An Integrative Theory of Self-Knowledge*. Oxford University Press.
- Cassam, Q. (2017) What asymmetry? Knowledge of self, knowledge of others, and the inferentialist challenge. *Synthese* 194, 723–741.
- Cassam, Q. (2014). Self-knowledge for humans (Esp. Ch. 11-12).
- Gopnik, A. (1993). ‘How we know our own minds: the illusion of first-person knowledge of intentionality’, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 16: 1–14.
- Ryle, G. (1949/2009). *The Concept of Mind*. Routledge (esp. Ch. 6).

- Wilson, T.D. (2002). *Strangers to Ourselves*. Belknap.

Week 11: Pedagogy and revision

We will finish the course by recapping what we've learnt so far and by thinking about the process of learning itself. Specifically, we will consider how knowledge is communicated by individuals to others.

Class readings:

- Csibra, G. & Gergely, G. (2009). Natural pedagogy. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 13(4), pp.148-153.

Secondary readings:

- Enfield, N. J., Levinson, Stephen C. (2006). *Roots of human sociality: culture, cognition and interaction*, Berg
- Gergely, G., Egyed, K., & Király, I. (2007). On Pedagogy, *Developmental Science*, 10(1) pp.139-146.

Assessment

This course has three components of assessment:

- Class Participation (10%)
- Mid-term essay of 1,500 words (40%). **Due Thursday 28th February 2019 by 12 pm.**
- End-of-semester essay of 2,500 words (50%). **Due Thursday 25th April 2019 by 12 pm.**

Essays

The essays will be assessed according to the marking guidelines found here:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/ppls/philosophy/current/undergraduate/assessment/marketing-guidelines>

For both essays, I will discuss one page plans with you (as well as any other concerns). Please use my office hours, but let me know if you cannot make them. Alternatively, if you email a plan to me, I will try to provide written feedback within a week.

Students will be required to set their own questions for both essays. Please send me your questions for approval at least a week in advance.

Class participation

The class participation component consists of a presentation (up to 20 mins). It should explain the week's material and raise points for discussion. You will give the presentation in pairs, so please demarcate (either in the presentation or afterwards) who was responsible for what. Each student should be responsible for part of both the summary and discussion points.

Please note that the requirements of a good presentation are similar to those of an essay. It should: be clearly structured; show your own understanding (prefer explaining the material over just repeating it); exhibit independent thought (this will be the case for the discussion points. E.g., offer some motivation for raising an issue, introduce a criticism to discuss, etc.). As such, I'll assess the presentation according to the *clarity, structure, understanding, and originality* components on the essay marking scheme.

The presentations will run from weeks 2-11. The presentation in week 11 should aim to discuss the overarching themes of the course as a whole; discussion of the core reading is encouraged but not mandatory for the presentation (since there are fewer course resources on this topic).

Autonomous learning groups

You have all been assigned to a small sub-group (of around 5 members each). I encourage you to discuss the material together, either in person or using the forums. And it would be an especially good idea to talk about essay plans and swap drafts with each other.