

Philosophy 216
Philosophy and Psychology
Fall 2010, TR 11:00-12:15, AVH 109
David Henderson, 1015 Oldfather Hall
Office hours 9:50-10:50 TR

Overview:

This course will explore three topics to which both psychological research and philosophical reflection are relevant: moral psychology, epistemology and the character of human cognitive processes, and the epistemology of our everyday interpretive understanding of others.

A central concern in the class will be the respects in which recent work in psychology **may have deep implications for both the methods and the theories of philosophy.** We will pay close attention to competing **understandings of philosophical methods** and associated philosophical positions. What are the **goals** these assign to the philosopher? What are the **products** of philosophy to be like? What are the **resources** that they imagine philosophers to possess? A central motive for the class will then be to look at some recent work in psychology and cognitive science generally, and to ask what might be the implications of this work for philosophy. For example, for some understanding of philosophy and its methods, the empirical work may suggest that the philosophers lack the resources they have supposed they have. (Access to conceptual truths, for example.) For other understandings, work in psychology and cognitive science may itself provide materials which themselves are needed to for the philosopher's own work. (More naturalistic understandings of philosophical methods have grown in influence over the last 30 years.) Thus, **with respect to one important humanities discipline, philosophy, the class will address the question: what knowledge, what perspectives, what forms of analysis, what standards of evaluation and evidence, are appropriate to it. And, more specifically, it will ask what information from psychology and cognitive sciences are important for it.**

ACE NOTE: In keeping with the above this class pursues ACE objective:

SLO5: Use knowledge, historical perspectives, analysis, interpretation, critical evaluation, and the standards of evidence appropriate to the humanities to address problems and issues.

Rather than addressing these above questions in the abstract, we will look at each of the three issue-areas mentioned above.

In connection with **moral philosophy** we will look at work that at least seems to suggest that one philosophical position that is commonly put forward as the most principled and deeply rational may itself have roots in some of the most primitive brain structures and may reflect the most rudimentary of social emotions. Other philosophical approaches have been happy to see the roots of ethics in sentiments or emotions. Here, it would seem that psychology may have much to say.

In epistemology, there has been a forty-year long methodological tug-of-war over what are the appropriate methods. Traditionally, philosophers have understood themselves as engaged, from their armchairs in a kind of reflection that could set out the a priori standards for how humans should arrive at and maintain their beliefs. Others have insisted that epistemology must be "naturalized"—integrated with disciplines such as psychology and cognitive science. This discussion itself has some interesting parallels in much of the empirical work on which the philosophers might themselves draw. It seems

that some investigators, notably those associated with the “heuristics and biases” tradition may have oriented themselves using epistemological ideas derived from inquiry that the traditional philosophers can themselves appreciate (logic, decision theory, the probability calculus). Others, fans of “fast and frugal processes” and an “adaptive toolbox” seem to argue that the epistemic evaluation of cognitive processes should not be anchored as the traditional epistemologists would have it. Here it seems that the psychologists and cognitive scientists may be drawing as much on various philosophical sources as some philosophers would like to draw on them. We will want to untangle the implications or influences in each direction.

Regarding the epistemology of interpretation, both philosopher, and cognitive and developmental psychologists have come to debate the relative strengths and weaknesses to two models of the human ability to understand and explain each other. Some, the theory-theorists, have insisted that this ability is rooted in a tacit theory learned in childhood, and undergoing refinement. We then settle on an understanding of another by a kind of inference to the best (theoretically grounded) explanation. Others, the simulation-theorists, hold that our abilities to understand others is rooted in an ability to employ our own cognitive processes “off line” in a kind of simulation—one operating on various pretend-beliefs, pretend-desires, or other pretend-input. There is obviously room for hybrid positions, and there are both philosophical and psychological partisans of most variants. (The debate was sharpened somewhat—but not obviously resolved—by the discovery of mirror neuron system.) Here we find a very fluid and collaborative exchange between philosophy and psychology. Here, it seems that there is little question among participants that psychology is highly relevant to the traditional philosophical issues. It also seems that the psychologists find philosophical work highly relevant.

Texts:

All materials for this course are available on the class webpage—on blackboard. The readings are listed below.

Evaluation:

There will be 3 take home assignments. Each will be worth 28% of your grade, for a total of 84% of your grade. These will be largely expository. The student will be asked to characterize the arguments or information to be found in the readings and to characterize their significance for the methods and results of philosophy, or for the associated psychology.

All assignments are to be submitted electronically using SafeAssign within blackboard. Acceptable formats include Word (preferred), RTF, and PDF.

The final 16% of your grade will be a matter of performance on in-class quizzes treating assigned readings for the class period. There will commonly be quizzes, and they will be graded on a four-point scale: 0 (lacking), 1 (sketchy), 2 (decent), 3 (good/solid). A student’s scores for the set of exams will be summed, and the total will be transformed into a percentage of the possible points, then this number will be weighted as 16% of the grade. (I will do this, in a way that drops the student’s two lowest scores; in effect allowing for 2 absences during the semester.)

ACE note: in view of the above evaluations, the class is directed to the reinforcement area: Writing

Topics and readings:

Topic: Moral Theory and Moral Psychology

1. Warmup:
 - a. Steven Pinker, "The Moral Instinct"
2. Trolley-ology, emotions and reason:
 - a. Joshua Greene, "The Secret Joke of Kant's Soul"
 - b. Jonathan Haidt, "The Emotional Dog and its Rational Tail"
 - c. John Mikhail, "Moral Cognition and Computational Theory"
 - d. Mark Timmons, "Towards a Sentimentalist Deontology"; Joshua Greene, "Reply to Mikhail and Timmons"
 - e. Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons, "Morphological Rationalism and the Psychology of Moral Judgment"
 - f. Colin F. Camerer and Ernst Fehr, "Measuring Social Norms and Preferences Using Experimental Games: A Guide for Social Scientists." Chapter 3, *Foundations of Human Sociality*, Henrich, Boyd, Bowles, Camerer, Fehr, and Gintis, (eds).

Topic: Epistemology and the Character of Human Cognitive Processes

3. Philosophical terrain
 - a. Michael Bishop and J. D. Trout, "The Pathologies of Standard Analytic Epistemology"
 - b. David Henderson and Terry Horgan, "Would You Really Rather be Lucky than Good?"
4. One System, Two System, Rationality and the "Simple" Minded
 - a. D. Kahneman and A. Tversky, "On the psychology of prediction."
 - b. G. Gigerenzer and U. Hoffrage, "How to improve Bayesian reasoning without instruction: Frequency formats"
 - c. Kahneman and S. Frederick, "A Model of Heuristic Judgment"
 - d. M. Osman, "An Evaluation of Dual-Process Theories of Reasoning"
 - e. R. Samuels, S. Stich, and M. Bishop, "Ending the Rationality Wars: How to Make Disputes about Human Rationality Disappear"

Topic: Simulation and Understanding/Explaining Others:

5. Simulation Theory v Theory Theory
 - a. A. Goldman, *Simulating Minds*, chapter 1.
 - b. A. Goldman, *Simulating Minds*, chapter 2,
 - c. A. Goldman, *Simulating Minds*, chapter 6.
 - d. A. Goldman, *Simulating Minds*, chapter 7.

Schedule:

8-23 Intro	8-25 Some Issues in Philosophical Ethics
8-30 1a	9-2 2a
9-6 2a/2b	9-8 2b
9-13 2c	9-15 2d
9-21 2e	9-23 2f

9-27 2f [Assignment 1 topic given]	9-29 TBA
10-4 TBA	10-6 Some Issues in Epistemology
10-11 Overview Epistemology, continued. [Assignment 1 due 11:00 AM]	10-13 3a
10-18 Fall Break	10-20 3b
10-25 4a	10-27 4b
11-1 4c	11-3 4d
11-8 4e [Assignment 2 topic given]	11-10 Overview Simulation
11-15 5a [Assignment 2 due 11:00 AM]	11-17 5b
11-22 5b	11-24 Thanksgiving Break
11-29 5c [Assignment 3 topic given]	12-1 5d
12-6 5d [Assignment 3 due 11:00 AM]	12-8 TBA

Final paper due at the Scheduled Final Exam Date:

3:30 p.m. Monday, Dec. 12