HONEYBEES, COMPUTATION AND CONCEPTS

1. INTRODUCTION

The driver in front of me on the 495 puts on his left-turn signal. What is she going to do? The obvious answer is that she put on her signal because she intends to merge left, and she wants the people behind her to know that. And she is going to merge left.

This example is ordinary, but it illustrates one important feature of our understanding of the world. In the example, I use the attribution of mental states to explain and predict the behavior of the people around me. And my predictions are successful. But what sort of thing are we ascribing to explain and predict behavior? And how does this ascription of mental states explain?

This course will introduce a number of fundamental topics in the philosophical study of psychology. The questions that we will ask in this course include:

1. How do personal-level psychological explanations of behavior relate to sub-personal computational, neurological or physical explanations of behavior?

2. An important feature of explanation in psychology and cognitive science is the attribution of representational content to mental processes, states, and events. What is representational content and how does it figure in these explanations?

3. Expanding on (2), what makes a representation represent what it does?

4. It is necessary to hold certain psychological states (e.g. a belief that today is a lovely day) that one have certain concepts (e.g. the concept DAY). What is a concept? It seems that we learn concepts, but it has been alleged that our conceptual repertoire is fixed at birth. Do we have reasons to think this is true?
2. OBJECTIVES

- to further develop particular philosophical skills, including the abilities to formulate targeted questions, to analyze arguments, and to read charitably;
- to develop a broader understanding of the ways in which philosophy and psychology can interact to teach us about the mind;
- to understand and develop the capacity to assess the major theoretical debates discussed in this course and to develop the tools to continue investigating these (or related) debates on our own;
- to hone and polish the intellectual virtues of precision and persistence.

3. ACCESSIBILITY

I am committed to an inclusive classroom in which all students have an opportunity to learn and excel. I recognize that not all students learn in the same way. Students needing an academic accommodation based on a disability of any kind should contact me personally or contact the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) at (310) 825-1501 or at Murphy Hall A255. Every possible effort will be made to accommodate students in a timely and confidential manner.

4. ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Philosophical reading is generally difficult, and it significantly helps with understanding to come to class with questions and thoughts already formulated. For this reason, it is both required and extremely important that you do the reading sometime before the class meets. There will be short writing assignments that promote this aim. In addition, I highly recommend the following guide to reading philosophy in a productive way:

http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html

There are two primary assignments for the course: a midterm exam and a final paper (tentatively 6-8 pages). There will also be four short writing assignments that will require you to exercise a particular philosophical skill in 1-2 pages. The writing assignments will be graded check-plus/check/check-minus/no-check. The check system will correspond to a numerical percentage of 100/90/75/0. There may be possible extra credit assignments.

The papers and reading-response assignments need to be submitted to turn-it-in (found on the course website). The assignments that you submit must abide by the UCLA academic honesty policy (http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/Student-Conduct-Code) and they must be handed in by the due date. The academic honesty policy forbids (this list is not exhaustive) plagiarism, fabrication of sources, and multiple submissions. You are responsible for reading and understanding the policy, which will be strictly enforced.
Extensions are possible in unusual circumstances, but you ought to contact me to request an extension before the due date. Please contact either Ian Boon or me if you have any questions about the assignments or readings.

The final grades will be determined according to this rubric:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Assignment</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Responses</td>
<td>15.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
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The grade penalty for late assignments is a deduction of 1/3 a whole letter grade per day late. Concretely, this means that a B+ paper that is a day late is penalized to a B. Reading response assignments will be marked down one grade level per day late (e.g. from a check-plus to a check).

The participation score will not be awarded automatically. In order to guarantee a full participation score, students must attend lecture and contribute. 3/5 of the participation grade will be determined by attendance alone (by percentage). 2/5 of the participation grade will be awarded for class, discussion, or office hour participation that advances the discussion in the class. Particularly excellent participation might be used in final grade tie-breakers (when a grade is within .5 percentage points of a different letter grade). If you have troubles attending class, please discuss this matter with me immediately.

5. COURSE TEXT

All the readings for the course will be available in .pdf form on the website. The following optional text might also be helpful:


6. READINGS

I value active in-class discussion, hence the following list is provisional. I will post an updated syllabus should the readings change significantly. The assigned reading for each week will average around two to four articles (spread out over two class meetings). This rate is marginally accelerated compared to the normal term due to the compressed (six week summer term) schedule of the course. Since the pace of the course is somewhat increased, it is very important that you keep up with the readings.

*Week One: Behaviorism and Functionalism:*
Levin (2013) “Functionalism” (SEP) sections 3.3 and 3.4
Block (1978) “Troubles with Functionalism”
Bermudez (2005) “Causes in the mind: from the functional mind to the representational mind” [from Philosophy of Psychology]

Week Two: Computational Theory of Mind:

**NO CLASS ON TUESDAY** [due to the July 4th holiday]

Marr (1982) *Vision* [excerpt]
Fodor (1978) “Propositional Attitudes”

Week Three: Computation and Representation


Week Four: Mental Representation and “Naturalism”

Dretske (1986) “Misrepresentation”

Week Five: Representation and Concepts

Fodor (2008) *LOT 2* [excerpt]

Week Six: Concept Acquisition

Margolis (1998) “How to Acquire a Concept”