PHILOSOPHY 129
PHILOSOPHY OF PSYCHOLOGY
Summer 2020, C Session
Draft Syllabus as of February 7, 2020

From Is The Man Who Is Tall Happy?

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Time: TUESDAYS AND THURSDAYS, 1PM - 3:05PM
Location: DODD HALL 167

Tentative syllabus as of February 7th 2020; subject to change
Course Overview

As a field of scientific inquiry, psychology aims to provide precise, empirically supported explanations of intelligent behavior and mental phenomena. In this course, we will investigate some perennial methodological and philosophical questions about this endeavor. Such questions include:

- What phenomena does a psychological theory aim to explain? What counts as giving an explanation of such phenomena? In what terms should such explanations be couched?

- What is the relationship between a scientific theory of psychology and our commonsense understanding of psychology? How much and which parts of the latter, if any, can or should be vindicated by scientific psychology?

- How much should psychological theory construction be guided or constrained by neuroscience? Can we explain what needs explaining using only concepts derived from the latter?

- Should we expect psychological theory to make substantial use of semantic notions such as reference and truth?

We will pursue these questions by developing and investigating two theses:

- **Representational Theory of Mind** (RTM): Mental states are relations to combinatorially structured mental representations

- **Computational Theory of Mind** (CTM): Mental processes are computations that operate on mental representations.

We will organize our development of these theses around the works of philosopher Jerry Fodor, who did much to articulate the views clearly and to argue for their importance to scientific psychology. In the first week of the course, we will raise general questions about what scientific psychology must explain, and how it must explain it. In weeks two and three, we will articulate RTM and CTM more precisely. We will also look at several arguments for them. In the remainder of the course, we will consider various challenges to the CTM/RTM paradigm. In week four, we will look at rival approaches to psychological theorizing that place much greater emphasis on concepts derived from neuroscience. We will canvas arguments for and against the claim that such approaches are likely to supplant CTM/RTM. In week five, we will consider arguments for and against the claim that CTM/RTM obviates scientific appeal to semantic notions such as reference or truth. In week six, we will consider arguments for and against the claim that CTM/RTM will be unable to explain the higher cognition of humans.

Course Materials

There is no official textbook for this course. All required readings will be available online via the course webpage. Please check the webpage regularly for updates.

Although most of our readings will be from the philosophical literature, I intend for this class to have an interdisciplinary spirit. So, as we go, I will try to post (or at least signal) optional supplementary readings from psychology, linguistics, and computer science.
Assignments & Grading

1. **Problem Sets**: 3 problem sets, each being worth 20% of your final grade. In total, \( 3 \times 20 = 60 \% \) of your final grade.

2. **Take-home final exam**: Due September 14th (the Monday after week 6 ends). Worth 40% of your final grade.

**Late assignments** will be docked by one full letter grade for every 48 hour period for which they are late.

You are expected to be familiar with and abide by UCLA’s policies on academic and intellectual integrity. They can be found here:

- [http://www.studentgroups.ucla.edu/dos/students/integrity/](http://www.studentgroups.ucla.edu/dos/students/integrity/)

Academic misconduct includes (but is not limited to) cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism. When in doubt, ask your TA or the instructor. Any suspected violation of university policy regarding academic conduct will be reported directly to the Office of the Dean of Students, no exceptions.

**Academic Accommodation**

Students needing an academic accommodation based on a disability should contact the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) [formerly the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD)] located at A255 Murphy Hall, (310) 825-1501. When possible, students should contact the CAE within the first two weeks of the session, as reasonable notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. For more information, visit [http://www.cae.ucla.edu/](http://www.cae.ucla.edu/).

**Problem Sets**

There will be three problem sets assigned in this course. The kinds of questions asked on the problem sets may vary. I may ask you to explain a technical concept, or to give illustrative examples for one. I may ask you to explain, in your own words, a claim or a premise of an argument we have seen. I may ask you to extract an argument from a portion of an assigned text. I may ask you to develop an original response to a claim or argument from the readings or lecture. I may ask you to relate something new to what we have seen previously in the class. I may provide a passage or view from the secondary literature, and as you to evaluate it in relation to course content. Some questions may have (more or less) correct answers; others may require you to set out your own interpretation or defense of a claim clearly and succinctly.

In general, the problem sets are meant to give you manageable and consistent practice in developing the skills necessary for interpreting and producing philosophy—and, more generally, the skills necessary to think carefully and critically about complicated issues. They are also meant to prompt you to reflect more deeply and originally on the issues we have discussed. Finally, they are designed to give you practice and feedback on the sorts of questions I will ask on the final exam.

You will have roughly 10 days to complete each problem set. The tentative schedule is:
• **First set:** Assigned at the end of Wk. 1 (8/7), due beginning of Wk. 3 (8/18)
• **Second set:** Assigned in the middle of Wk. 3 (8/18), due end of Wk. 4 (8/28)
• **Third set:** Assigned end of Wk. 4 (8/28), due middle of Wk. 6 (9/8)

**Reading Schedule**

**Unit 1: Explananda and explanation in psychology**

**Tuesday 8/4**
- “What psychology is” from *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Psychology* by Daniel Weiskopf and Fred Adams (2015).

**Thursday 8/6**
- First half of “How does it work’ versus ‘What are the laws?’: Two conceptions of psychological explanation” by Robert Cummins (2000).

**Unit 2: CTM & RTM - The view and its virtues**

**Tuesday 8/11**
- Watch “Registers and RAM” at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fpnE6UAfbtU

**Thursday 8/13**
- “The Language of Thought” by Susan Schneider (2009).
- Begin reading Chapter 2 of *The Language of Thought* by Jerry Fodor (1975).

**Tuesday 8/18**
- Finish reading Chapter 2 of *The Language of Thought* by Jerry Fodor (1975).

**Thursday 8/20**

**Unit 3: Brain-inspired challenges to CTM/RTM**

**Tuesday 8/25**
• Watch “But what is a neural network?” at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aircAruvnKk

Thursday 8/27

Unit 4: CTM/RTM and Semantic Properties

Tuesday 9/1
• “Methodological solipsism considered as a research strategy in cognitive psychology” by Jerry Fodor (1980).
• Excerpt from “Internalist explorations” by Noam Chomsky (2003).

Thursday 9/3
• “Origins of Perception” by Tyler Burge (2010).

Unit 5: CTM/RTM and Higher Cognition

Tuesday 9/8

Thursday 9/10
• “On Fodor’s Problem” by Peter Carruthers (2003).