



PHIL*3280 21st Century Philosophy

Fall 2018

Section(s): C01

Department of Philosophy

Credit Weight: 0.50

Version 1.00 - August 29, 2018

1 Course Details

1.1 Calendar Description

This course is an introduction to the most current philosophical texts and movements developed since the beginning of the 21st Century. Students will be taught to understand and work creatively with the most recent ideas in the discipline. Material covered will focus almost exclusively on the philosophical texts written in or after the year 2000.

Pre-Requisite(s): 1.50 credits in Philosophy or 7.50 credits

1.2 Course Description

This course will focus on a book by the Australian philosopher Kim Sterelny: *Thought in a hostile world*. It's a book about the evolution of cognition that integrates a number of the findings of the behavioural and biological sciences (psychology, animal ethology, evolutionary biology, game theory...) into a unified picture. Of particular philosophical interest is Sterelny's focus on folk psychology. That's the idea that our "folk concepts" of belief and desire play a real explanatory role in our actions. So, for instance, I can explain you are a student in this course by saying that you *desired* to study the evolution of cognition, and that you *believed* this course would help you to do so. And so you *signed up* for the course: desire-belief-action. There are two opposed views as to this sort of explanation. The first says that we can use folk concepts successfully because they are *real*. The second says they are some sort of cultural artifact, ultimately to be replaced by more scientific concepts and explanations, and not really very successful, anyway. Sterelny charts a middle course: he thinks that they are cultural artifacts *and* that they are real, though both the notion of "cultural" and the notion of "real" are given novel spins.

1.3 Timetable

Timetable is subject to change. Please see WebAdvisor for the latest information.

LEC Mon, Wed, Fri

01:30PM - 02:20PM

MINS, Room 103

1.4 Final Exam

Exam time and location is subject to change. Please see WebAdvisor for the latest information.

EXAM Fri

11:30AM - 01:30PM (2018/12/07)

Room TBA Room TBA

2 Instructional Support

2.1 Instructor(s)

Don Dedrick

Email: ddedrick@uoguelph.ca

Telephone: please use email.

Office: MCKN 329

2.2 Office hours

Don Dedrick is available on Monday and Wed from 11-12 am in Rm. 329 MacKinnon Bldg. (Philosophy Dept.), and by appointment at other times to be agreed upon with individual students. You don't need an appointment for regular office hours. Please use email if you need to set up an alternative time.

3 Learning Resources

3.1 Required Resource(s)

Thought in a Hostile World (Textbook)

https://books.google.ca/books/about/Thought_in_a_Hostile_World.html?id=Uc2XQgAACAAJ&redir_e

Thought in a Hostile World, by Kim Sterelny

Paperback: 280 pages

Publisher: Wiley-Blackwell; 1 edition (Sept. 12 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0631188878

4 Learning Outcomes

This course has two main objectives. The first is to study *Thought in a hostile world*, and to come to some assessment as to its strengths and weaknesses. The second, more important from my point of view, is to equip you for thinking about the nature of our thought as viewed through a historical, evolutionary lens. By the end of the course you should have a good grasp of many of the fundamental ideas and concepts that virtually everyone that works in this area has an opinion on, and deploys in some way or another. The nature of cognition really is a 21st

century topic, across many fields not just philosophy. This course will provide you with many of the tools for participation in this area of study.

4.1 Course Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. Have a critical perspective on issues in the evolution of cognition.
 2. Grasp and apply key concepts relevant to evolutionary theory as it pertains to the evolution of cognition.
 3. Communicate key concepts relevant to the evolution of cognition.
 4. Understand the role of philosophy in the interdisciplinary study of cognition.
 5. Assimilate work from the variety of disciplines that need to be synthesized in the study of cognitive evolution.
 6. Write, in depth, about one issue in the evolution of cognition.
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5 Teaching and Learning Activities

5.1 Lecture

Week 1

Topic(s): Introduction to the course. A discussion of the "big picture" we are aiming to grasp. A discussion of the course requirements.

Week 2

Topic(s): This week is devoted to a number of key concepts that are central to the study of cognition in an evolutionary context, and to a number of related philosophical topics. We will *not* be dealing with the big picture this week, but instead looking at a number of important concepts and research programs that need (or seem to need) integration in an adequate study of cognitive evolution. This week we shall discuss *at least* the following set of concepts: folk psychology, eliminativism, modularity, evolution by natural selection, sexual selection, levels of selection.

Please Read: Start reading *Thought in a Hostile World* [HW]. This course is about HW, and you want to read and reread it as much as possible. Also: Notes pertaining to the lecture topics for this week, written by the instructor, will be posted on courselink. Please read them prior to class.

Week 3

Topic(s): We start putting the pieces together. We discuss evolutionary naturalism, the relationship between folk psychology and evolution, as well as the idea that the simplest form of animal cognitive devices are "detection systems."

Please Read: HW Chapters 1 & 2.

Week 4

Topic(s):

One way to think about Sterelny's approach to the evolution of cognition: there are building blocks to our minds that rest on lower blocks, bootstrapping organisms from less potent to more potent cognitive skills. The detection systems we talked about last week are limited, in that they are coupled fairly closely to the stimuli that activate them. More powerful cognition becomes possible when representations are decoupled from activating stimuli. Such decoupling *has* definitely evolved (when you daydream about your upcoming trip to Australia, you are using "decoupled representations.") But *how* could the ability to do this--to decouple from "the world" evolve? That's our topic this week.

Please Read: HW Chapter 3.

Week 5

Topic(s):

Some kind of sociality is a crucial building block for any species (even if it's "Panda sociality," where solitary animals get together for sex, and that's it--along with 18 months of child rearing for females!) Human sociality is extremely complex and extremely powerful. How can it/ did it evolve? (Again we know it has evolved, since, well, we're socializing). The topic for this week is the social intelligence hypothesis: the idea that animals may get "smart" in order to deal with the complexity of social demands: intelligence fuels increased sociality fuels intelligence fuels ... you can see where this is going.

Please Read: HW Chapter 4.

Week 6

Topic(s):

Most of what Sterelny has discussed so far concerns beliefs, how an organism's epistemic situation evolves. In this week we turn to preferences. You will recall that folk psychology involves beliefs and desires in its descriptions and explanations of behaviour. How do preferences evolve? Are they on a track distinct from beliefs? We also want to consider the ways that evolution bears on the status of folk psychology. Can evolution generate the sort of cognitive devices, epistemic and preferential, that a defence of folk psychology requires? We are just beginning to address that issue this week.

Please Read: HW Chapter 5.

Week 7

Topic(s):

This is the first of two weeks for two chapters: How did hominids evolve? How did human cooperation evolve? These are historical questions that are difficult to answer because we have no direct access to the evidence. Sterelny recounts some current theorizing about hominid (great ape, including us) evolution, and more speculative ideas about the evolutionary context of the human evolution of cooperation. Aside from the historical story, issues with the methodology and the reconstruction of such histories are also discussed. We will spend more time on cooperation than on hominid evolution.

Please Read: HW Chapters 6 & 7.

Week 8**Topic(s):**

This is the second week on Hominid evolution and cooperation: How did hominids evolve? How did human cognition cooperation evolve? These are historical questions that are difficult to answer because we have no direct access to the evidence. Sterelny recounts some current theorizing about hominid (great ape, including us) evolution, and more speculative ideas about the evolutionary context of the human evolution of cooperation. Asside from the historical story, issues with the methodology and the reconstruction of such histories are also discussed. We will spend more time on cooperation than on hominid evolution.

Please Read: HW Chapters 6 & 7.

Week 9**Topic(s):**

Another two-week pair of topics. [1] Niche construction is a key idea in contemporary cultural evolutionary theory. When we build a house, we insulate ourselves (literally!) from many environmental pressures. We have constructed a "niche" that can be replicated across generations, becoming a part of our evolutionary heritage (just as we inherit genes we may inherit the artifacts produced by our lineage--a form of "dual inheritance.") [2] What makes humans different than other animals? One now predominant answer is cognitive flexibility or "placticity." Is the central human adaptation pasticity? Is plasticity even an adaptation?

Please Read: HW Chapters 8 & 9

Week 10**Topic(s):**

Continuation. [1] Niche construction is a key idea in contemporary cultural evolutionary theory. When we build a house, we insulate ourselves (literally!) from many environmental pressures. We have constructed a "niche" that can be replicated across generations, becoming a part of our evolutionary heritage (just as we inherit genes we may inherit the artifacts produced by our

lineage--a form of "dual inheritance.") [2] What makes humans different from other animals? One now predominant answer is cognitive flexibility or "placticity." Is the central human adaptation pasticity? Is plasticity even an adaptation?

Please Read: HW Chapters 8 & 9

Week 11

Topic(s):

We come to the final section of the book, and its return to the fate of folk psychology. With respect to the question: Is folk psychology "real" or should it be eliminated?--we are now in a position to address that question from an evolutionary perspective. We discuss modularity and related concerns, this week and the next.

Please Read: HW Chapter 10

Week 12

Topic(s):

Continuation. We come to the final section of the book, and its return to the fate of folk psychology. With respect to the question: Is folk psychology "real" or should it be eliminated?--we are now in a position to address that question from an evolutionary perspective. We discuss modularity and related concerns.

Please Read: HW Chapter 10

Week 13

Topic(s):

Final week! What *does* account for our ability to explain, predict, and understand other agents? The last chapter of HW is intended as an opportunity to draw all the strings together, as much as possible. We shall attempt to do so. The replacement class we have for this week (Friday) is a continuation.

Please Read: HW Chapter 11

6 Assessments

Assesment: one midterm, one written assignment, one final exam.

6.1 Marking Schemes & Distributions

6.2 Assessment Details

Midterm (25%)

Date: Mon, Oct 15, in class

PLEASE READ: The midterm will be in two parts [I] questions about key concepts: what they involve, how they are applied, and [II] more general short written answers about larger questions. I will provide a list of the concepts you need to know for [I], as well as a list of questions from which the actual midterm questions will be drawn. So, for example, I might provide you with a list of 4 questions for [II], 2 of which are on the actual midterm.

Questions in [I] will be T/F and multiple choice.

Be on time to this class! The midterm will begin as soon as possible to give you the most time possible.

Essay (40%)

Date: Sun, Nov 25, 11:58 PM, Submit to dropbox by 11:58 Sunday.
Details to follow. I will provide a list of possible topics.

PLEASE READ: This due date (Nov. 25) is set so that papers will be marked at least 4 days prior to the exam. You may hand your paper in a week late, with no penalty. *However*, you should not expect to receive the same degree of commentary on the paper if you do so. Extended date with no guarantee of comments: up to Dec. 2, 11: 58 (no later than this date/time).

Note: the fact there is "no guarantee" does not mean you will, necessarily, get no comments; it does not mean, necessarily, you will get fewer comments. It means there is no guarantee.

If you are going to have difficulty meeting both of the deadlines please contact me as soon as possible.

Exam (35%)

Date: Fri, Dec 7
EXAM Fri 11:30AM - 01:30PM (2018/12/07) Room TBA Room TBA

NOTE: Exam dates and times may change! Please confirm exam date/time with webadvisor.

PLEASE READ: The Final will have exactly the same structure as the midterm. The material you are responsible for on the Final will be drawn from the material that comes after the midterm. Note that some concepts, such as folk psychology, are discussed throughout HW and throughout the course. A study guide will be provided, just like the one for the midterm.

7 University Statements

7.1 Email Communication

As per university regulations, all students are required to check their e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the University and its students.

7.2 When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or

compassionate reasons please advise the course instructor (or designated person, such as a teaching assistant) in writing, with your name, id#, and e-mail contact. The regulations and procedures for [Academic Consideration](#) are detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar.

7.3 Drop Date

Courses that are one semester long must be dropped by the end of the fortieth class day; two-semester courses must be dropped by the last day of the add period in the second semester. The regulations and procedures for [Dropping Courses](#) are available in the Undergraduate Calendar.

7.4 Copies of Out-of-class Assignments

Keep paper and/or other reliable back-up copies of all out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

7.5 Accessibility

The University promotes the full participation of students who experience disabilities in their academic programs. To that end, the provision of academic accommodation is a shared responsibility between the University and the student.

When accommodations are needed, the student is required to first register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS). Documentation to substantiate the existence of a disability is required, however, interim accommodations may be possible while that process is underway.

Accommodations are available for both permanent and temporary disabilities. It should be noted that common illnesses such as a cold or the flu do not constitute a disability.

Use of the SAS Exam Centre requires students to book their exams at least 7 days in advance, and not later than the 40th Class Day.

More information: www.uoguelph.ca/sas

7.6 Academic Misconduct

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and it is the responsibility of all members of the University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. University of Guelph students have the responsibility of abiding by the University's policy on academic misconduct regardless of their location of study; faculty, staff and students have the responsibility of supporting an environment that discourages misconduct. Students need to remain aware that instructors have access to and the right to use electronic and other means of detection.

Please note: Whether or not a student intended to commit academic misconduct is not relevant for a finding of guilt. Hurried or careless submission of assignments does not excuse students from responsibility for verifying the academic integrity of their work before submitting it. Students who are in any doubt as to whether an action on their part could be construed as an academic offence should consult with a faculty member or faculty advisor.

The [Academic Misconduct Policy](#) is detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar.

7.7 Recording of Materials

Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be

recorded or copied without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer. Material recorded with permission is restricted to use for that course unless further permission is granted.

7.8 Resources

The [Academic Calendars](#) are the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate, graduate and diploma programs.
