

University of Guelph Fall 2013
Department of Philosophy
PHIL*2250 Knowledge, Mind and Language (3-0) [0.50]
Instructor: D. Dedrick
Classroom: MACK 226 [T,TR 2:30-3:50]
Office: Rm. 329 Mackinnon Bldg.
Office hours: Wednesday 1-2 and Thursday 12-1 [or by appointment]

COURSE DESCRIPTION. We all have *minds*, use *language*, and at one time or another claim to have *knowledge*, that, for instance, Guelph is in southern Ontario. But how clear are we, really, about these things (mind, language, knowledge) whatever kinds of “thing” they may be? They are not things in the way a carrot is a thing, but what about an iPhone, a seemingly different kind of “thing”? And what about their relations? I express my claims to know things linguistically. Does that mean an animal without language has no knowledge, since it has no language? Yet is that fair: what is language? Do Dolphins have it? Prairie Dogs? (you may laugh; wait until you see what they are up to). And what is a mind? How does it differ from, say, a computer or a rock. Could there be a mind that does not process information, and if not, is processing information what makes a mind? In that case your favorite robot (mine is Mr. Data) has a mind. Theories of information processing involve language (computer “language”) so again, is language necessary for having a mind? Also: is there some part of our mind--our consciousness, say--that goes beyond information processing? In this course we shall explore these and related questions about the nature and relatedness of minds, language, and knowledge.

Learning objectives: to permit the student to explore the nature of and relations among minds, language, knowledge. To develop a historical perspective on the way these concepts have been treated over that past century.

EVALUATION

- Mid-term test.** 25% of total grade. Thursday Oct. 17. In class test.
- In class quizzes** (Done in groups; 1 per week; best 5 count for 20% of total grade)
- Essay.** 25% of total grade. Due Nov. 22, to be submitted in class. Length: 2500 words.
- Final Exam in exam period.** 30% of total grade.

No late work accepted without acceptable documentation.

Please see the standard statements the University of Guelph requires you to read (website)

READINGS and VIDEOS: All readings and videos watched in class will be available from the website.

Week 1 [Sept.5]

Introduction to the course

Week 2 [Sept. 9-13]

This week we shall discuss our "intuitions" as to the nature and relationships between mind, language, and knowledge. Please watch the videos: V1, V2 and V3 prior to classes,

and answer the questions posed in Question Set 1. All materials available from the website. There are no readings.

Week 3 [Sept. 16-20]

Topic: Behaviourism and the rejection of consciousness.

Readings: R1, R2, review V1 (Skinner)

Week 4 [Sept. 23-27]

Topic: The cognitive revolution in psychology, the foundations of contemporary linguistic (Chomsky-style) and the origins of cognitive science (in Descartes)

Reading: R3 and R4,

Week 5 [Sept. 30-Oct. 4]

Topic: Chomsky suggests that *homo sapiens* are the only animals with "language." We look at Donald Davidson's notorious argument that non-human animals have no thought, and also a first step in the critique of that idea.

Reading: R5, R6 and R7; V4 (theory of mind)

Week 6 [Oct 7-11]

Topic: Continuation--"animal minds."

Readings: R8, R9, V5, V6, V7

Week 7 [Oct. 14-18] Note: Thanksgiving is Oct.14

Topic: Tuesday: Prairie dogs and the Piraha: is it possible that some animals have "language" and some people do not? Thursday: Midterm.

Readings: R10, V8, V9

Thanksgiving: Monday Oct. 14

Midterm Thursday October 17

Week 8 [Oct. 21-25]

Topic: Alan Turing, John Searle, and the mind as a computer.

Readings: R11, R12

Week 9 [Oct. 28-Nov. 1]

Topic: The mind as embodied: is embodiment a solution to Searle's problems with artificial intelligence?

Readings: TBA

Week 10 [Nov. 4-Nov. 8]

Topic: Skeptical problems with our "knowledge" of other minds.

Readings: TBA

Week 11 [Nov. 11-15]

Topic: What are minds, language, and knowledge for: Evolutionary explanations and considerations.

Readings: TBA

Week 12 [Nov. 18-Nov. 22]

Topic: Consciousness: is there a special problem when it comes to a scientific explanation (or any explanation) of consciousness

Readings: TBA

Assignment due Nov. 21

Week 12 [Nov. 25-Nov. 28]

Summary and review Tuesday; no class Thursday.

Reading: TBA