

PHIL*2250
Mind, Language, and Knowledge
Syllabus, Fall 2016

Room: MacKinnon 229

Time: Tuesday & Thursday, 10:00- 11:20am.

Instructor: Dr. Stefan Linnquist

Office: Mackinnon 358

Office Visiting Hours: Tuesday 1:30-2:30, or by apt.

Course Website: <http://biophilosophy.ca/Teaching/Philosophy2250.html>

Course Description

We often find ourselves asking what it might be like to experience the world from the perspective of another species of animal, such as a blue whale, a common octopus, or even a jumping spider. Are these animals conscious? Can they form thoughts that are comparable to our own? Do some non-human animals possess a language? If so, could we come to understand it? Do other animals experience emotions like ours? Such questions raise issues that are central to the discipline of philosophy. Philosophers are interested in the meaning of terms like "experience," "consciousness," "belief," "thought," "emotion," etc. As you will soon come to appreciate, one requires a sharp understanding of these terms in order to frame questions about the mental lives of non-humans. Philosophers are also interested in how we come to know about the contents of our own minds, and whether that knowledge is fundamentally different from our knowledge of other minds. Anyone interested in the study of animal minds must grapple with these epistemological issues. In addition, there are various ethical issues that surround the study of animal minds. If other animals are capable of suffering or making plans, this has implications for how we ought to treat them.

This course begins with a brief introduction to the epistemic problems surrounding the ascription of mental states to animals. We consider why our pre-theoretical intuitions about animal minds might be deeply mistaken, encouraging us to ascribe complex mental states that don't exist. Finally, we

consider five arguments that are sometimes used to justify the ascription of complex mental states to animals.

Part 2 of the course reviews some attempts by scientists to understand animal minds. In this section, students will get a taste of how researchers have attempted to overcome the problems identified in the previous section. In particular, we will briefly review the anecdotal approach developed by Charles Darwin, the behaviourist approach developed by Morgan, Thorndike and others, and the ethological approach developed by Lorenz, Tinbergen and Von Frisch. Some students will undertake group research projects on one of two related questions: (1) should Morgan's Cannon be adopted by animal psychologists? (2) has the problem of anthropomorphism been exaggerated in psychology? Groups will present their work to the class.

Part 3 deals specifically with the issue of animal consciousness. We will consider various definitions of this term, and consider which form(s) of consciousness non-human animals might possess. A central question is whether consciousness is an inherently private phenomenon- something to which only the subject has access- or, whether it can be understood 'from the outside' as it were. Some students will also undertake a group research project on one of two related topics: (1) is introspection a reliable source of knowledge about human sensations? (2) Is animal learning sufficient evidence for animal consciousness? Groups will present their work.

Even if animals possess some form of consciousness, it is questionable whether they have a capacity for complex thoughts, or for sophisticated forms of communication (e.g. language), or whether they have the ability to interpret the mental states of others. Part 4 of the course addresses each of these three questions.

The question of animal thought touches on whether animals possess concepts and whether concepts are even required for thought. Some students will undertake research projects on (1) the nature of non-conceptual mental states, and (2) the case for skepticism about animal beliefs. Groups will present their work to the class.

There are a wide range of issues that arise in the study of animal communication. We will focus on the question of how to determine whether animal signals are intentional (whether they refer to things in the world), or, whether they are merely expressive. Some students will undertake group research projects on (1) the existence of language in cetations, and (2) the teaching of language to primates. Their results will be presented to the class.

The question of mind-reading asks whether animals recognize others as having mental states. In particular, we will be interested in the sorts of experiments used to detect mind reading. We will also consider whether animal emotions are perhaps easier or different from animal thoughts as far as mind reading is concerned. Some students will undertake group research projects on (1) whether animals possess complex emotions like jealousy and empathy, and (2) whether scientists should take animal personalities into account in their research. Again, these groups will present their work.

Learning Objectives

- By answering regularly assigned discussion questions, both in writing and verbally in class, students will become fluent in the philosophical issues surrounding the study of animal minds. By the end of the course, students should be capable of engaging in a professional-level discussion of these issues.
- By keeping up with the readings and preparing for exams, students will hone their skills in philosophical analysis and critical thinking.
- By undertaking small-group research projects, students will learn how to search online databases for information relevant to a particular topic.
- By writing up the results of their group research projects, students will develop their skills in synthesizing and assessing information.
- By presenting the findings of their research projects to the class, students will gain valuable practice in communicating abstract concepts to a small audience.

Assignments and Grading

Group Research Projects and Presentations (30%)

At the beginning of the semester, students will form small research groups of 5-6 individuals. Each group will choose or be assigned a research topic. Those topics correspond to material that will be covered at different points throughout the semester. So, some research projects will be due sooner than others. The dates that students will present each project to the class are detailed on the Course Outline (below).

Each research project will consist of three components. First, each student must undertake a search of relevant literature to identify an article that is relevant to the topic that they are researching. Students will then

meet to discuss their articles, and work together to develop a synthesis that explains how the articles are related. The aim should be to develop a narrative that strings together the different articles. For example, you might identify a common assumption that several of the articles make, which you think is questionable. Or, perhaps some of the articles employ a particular method of which other articles are critical.

Once this is done, you will write up the results of your analysis. It is up to you to decide how to put together your findings and the results of your discussion in a way that is clear and concise.

Finally, each group will have approximately 25 minutes to present its findings to the class. Again, groups can present their findings in any way that they decide to be effective. Each presentation will be followed by a brief (10 minute) question period. Grading for this assignment will be roughly 10% for the quality of your search and the synthesis, 10% for the clarity and concision of the report, and 10% for the quality of the presentation and discussion.

Discussion Questions (25%)

For most readings, students will be provided with a list of short discussion questions that raise focal issues in the article or chapter. Answers to these questions must be submitted electronically (via the Dropbox in Courselink) prior to the class in which the relevant article is discussed. Due dates and times will be marked on each assignment. Students are required to submit assignments in on time regardless of whether they discuss the reading.

Midterms (30%)

Dates for the two midterms are identified on the Course Outline. Students will be provided with a list of practice questions several days prior to each midterm. Midterm questions will be a subset of those practice questions.

Class Participation (15%)

Students are expected to talk about their answers to discussion questions in class. They are also expected to attend and ask questions about other students' presentations. This sort of verbal exchange is an important part of doing philosophy, and we will make a concerted effort to remain respectful of everyone during this part of the course. I will be keeping track of your contributions in class, and at the end of semester will assign a grade based on those records.

Course Outline

Part 1. Epistemic Challenges to Understanding Animal Minds

Date

- **Sept. 8:** Course introduction
Assignment: Questions on Dennett article (due Sept. 15).
- **Sept. 13:** Lecture*: The temptation of anthropomorphism.
- **Sept. 15:** Discussion - Dennett article: "Animal Consciousness: what matters and why?"
- **Sept. 20:** Lecture: Arguments for other animal minds
Read: *The Animal Mind*, pages 4-22.
- **Sept. 22:** Lecture*: Common mistakes in evolutionary reasoning.

Part 2. Scientific Approaches to Understanding Animal Minds

- Sept. 27:** Lecture*: Anecdotal Anthropomorphism & rise of Behaviourism.
Read: *The Animal Mind*, pages 23-44.
Assignment: Questions on Ch. 2, *The Animal Mind* (due Oct 4).
- Sept. 29:** Lecture*: Ethology and the reaction to behaviourism.
Read: *The Animal Mind*, pages 44-50.
- **Oct. 4:** Discussion of Chapter 2, *The Animal Mind*.
- **Oct. 6:** Group Presentations: Morgan's Canon & Innateness in Ethology.
Assignment: Questions on animal consciousness (due Oct. 18).

Part 3: Animal Consciousness

- Oct. 11:** Fall Study Break.

-Oct 13: Lecture*- Philosophical issues in the study of consciousness.
Read: Ch.3, *The Animal Mind* (pages 52-79).

-Oct. 18: Discussion of animal consciousness questions.

-Oct. 20: Group Presentations: introspection and animal learning.
Assignment: Questions on conceptual thought (Due Nov. 3)

-Oct 25: Review lecture and question period.

-Oct 27: Midterm exam.

Part 4: Belief, Communication, Mindreading, and Personality

-Nov. 1: Lecture: Thinking, rationality, and concepts in animals.
Read: Ch. 4, *The Animal Mind* (pages 80-109).

-Nov. 3: Discussion of conceptual thought questions.

-Nov. 8: Group presentations: non-conceptual thought and skepticism about animal beliefs.

-Nov. 10: Lecture on Animal communication.
Read: Ch. 5, *The Animal Mind* (pages 110-138).
Assignment: Questions on animal mindreading (Due Nov. 22)

-Nov. 15: Group Presentations: language in primates & dolphins.

-Nov. 17: Lecture*: Is animal personality a useful construct?

-Nov. 22: Discussion of animal mindreading questions.

-Nov. 24: Group Presentations: emotions and animal personalities.

-Nov. 29: Review lecture and question period.

-Dec. 1: Second Midterm.

Note that starred (*) lectures are ones in which novel material will be presented. Students will be responsible for some of this material on the midterms. The only way to obtain this material is in class, by taking notes.

Other important Information

EMAIL COMMUNICATION

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

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 email contact. See the Undergraduate Calendar's [information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration](#).

DROP DATE

The last date to drop one-semester courses, without academic penalty, is November 4, 2016. See the Undergraduate Calendar's [regulations and procedures for Dropping Courses](#).

COPIES OF OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

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

ACCESSIBILITY

The University of Guelph is committed to creating a barrier-free environment. Providing services for students is a shared responsibility among students, faculty and administrators. This relationship is based on respect of individual rights, the dignity of the individual and the University community's shared commitment to an open and supportive learning environment. Students requiring service or accommodation, whether due to an identified, ongoing disability or a short-term disability should contact Student Accessibility Services as soon as possible. For more information, contact SAS at 519-824-4120 ext. 56208 or email sas@uoguelph.ca or refer to the [SAS website](#).

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](#).

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.

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: <http://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars>