**PHILOSOPHY OF PSYCHOLOGY I**  
*(6AANA024) FALL 2016*

Credits: 15 units  
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Consultation Hours: TBD

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course will explore philosophical issues arising from areas of contemporary research in psychology and cognitive science. In the first part of the course, we consider a number of foundational questions. What is the nature of psychological explanation? In what sense, if any, do psychological processes involve representations? How do explanations in terms of neurons relate to folk psychological explanations? We will discuss the extremely influential computational theory of mind, as well as some alternative theoretical frameworks. In the second part of the course, we will explore philosophical questions that are raised by specific topics in contemporary psychological research.

**ASSESSMENT**

Formative Assessment: 1 x 2,500 word essay due on TBD  
Summative Assessment: 2 x 2,500 word essays (50% each) due 16:00, Wednesday 18 January 2017

**READING**

The readings for the course are separated into the following two categories:

**Core Reading:** reading that everyone who wants proper coverage of the subject must read.  

**Recommended Reading:** readings that are strongly recommended to help you further develop your views on a particular subject.

**Additional Reading:** useful background readings for anyone interested in further exploring a topic.

The following are good introductory texts for anyone seeking background knowledge:


**Week 1: Psychological Explanation and ‘Levels’ of Description**

*Core Reading*  
Recommended Reading

Additional Reading

Week 2: The Computational Theory of Mind: Symbolic Representations and Rules

Core Reading

Recommended Reading

Additional Reading
Clark, A. 2013: Mindware. Chapters 2-3.

Week 3: Modularity of Mind

Core Reading

Recommended Reading

Further Reading

Week 4: Connectionism
Core Reading

Recommended Reading

Additional Reading

Week 5: Predictive Coding and the Bayesian Brain

Core Reading

Recommended Reading

Additional Reading

Week 6: Neuroimaging

Core Reading

Recommended Reading
Klein, C. 2010: Images are not the evidence in neuroimaging British Journal for the Philosophy of Science 61: 265-278.

Additional Reading

Week 7: Consciousness

Core Reading
Chalmers, D. 2004: How can we construct a science of consciousness? In M. Gazzaniga (ed.)

Recommended Reading

Additional Reading

Week 8: Social Cognition

Core Reading

Recommended Reading

Additional Reading

Week 9: Implicit Attitudes

Core Reading

Recommended Reading

Additional Reading
Week 10: Delusions

Core Reading

Recommended Reading

Additional Reading

QUESTIONS FOR FORMATIVE ESSAY

1) Fodor claims that the essence of modularity is that cognitive modules are informationally encapsulated. Should we accept this description or is there a more plausible way to conceive of modularity?

2) Does the fact that people disagree when it comes to introspection-based judgments about conscious experience show that introspection is not a reliable way to study the nature of consciousness?

3) How should theories in cognitive psychology be constrained by theories at the neurobiological level or by our commonsense psychological understanding of human behaviour?

4) Are there good reasons for thinking that delusions are so irrational that they could not be a type of belief? If they are not beliefs, what sort of mental state are delusions?

5) Can the discovery of "mirror neurons" help us decide between simulation theories and the "theory" theory of everyday psychological understanding?

6) What advantages, if any, do connectionist models of cognition have over classical computational models?

7) Are implicit attitudes unconscious beliefs, or are they some other type of mental state?

8) Can neuro-imaging data ever demonstrate that a particular cognitive theory is true? If so, how? If not, then is there any theoretical use for neuro-imaging data?
QUESTIONS FOR SUMMATIVE ESSAYS

1) Could commonsense folk psychological explanations of human behaviour eventually be replaced by neuroscientific explanations of the same behaviour? Why or why not?

2) Does the computational theory of the mind depend on there being a Language of Thought? Why or why not?

3) Connectionist models aim to do away with the idea that mental processing is rule-governed. What is the alternative conception of mental processing that connectionists rely on? How could this conception explain processes like reading words aloud or inferential reasoning that seem to be guided by rules?

4) Do we understand the psychological states of others because we apply a theory of mind to their observable behaviour or because we simulate their situation? Or both? Or neither?

5) To what extent are people responsible for their implicit attitudes?

6) Does the fact that people disagree when it comes to introspection-based judgments about conscious experience show that introspection is not a reliable way to study the nature of consciousness? What other methods, if any, are available?

7) Explain the notion of informational encapsulation. Drawing on a range of empirical examples, critically evaluate the claim that input systems (e.g., perceptual systems and language processing systems) are informationally encapsulated.

8) There is good evidence that some kind of abnormal experience figures in the aetiology of many delusions. Is the occurrence of an abnormal experience sufficient to explain why people are delusional? If not, what other sort of cognitive impairment offers the most plausible account of delusions?