

## PH3245: LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT

**Meeting time:** Tuesdays 4-7 pm

**Venue:** AS4-0119

**Modular Credits:** 4

**Prerequisites:** PH2241 or PH3212 or PH2242 or PH3210.

**Instructor:** Bob Beddor

**Email:** [rbeddor@gmail.com](mailto:rbeddor@gmail.com), [phibrs@nus.edu](mailto:phibrs@nus.edu)

**Office Hours:** Mondays 1-2pm and by appointment.

(My office is the Philosophy Department, located on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of AS3.)

**Course Description:** This course explores topics at the intersection of philosophy of language and philosophy of mind. Most of the course will be divided into two units.

**Unit 1:** *The connections between language and thought.* Here we will explore questions such as:

- Does linguistic competence suffice for consciousness?
- Can nonlinguistic animals think?
- Does all thought take place in a language?

**Unit 2:** *Explaining linguistic and mental content.* One striking feature of both language and thought is their *aboutness*. Language and thought both *represent* things in the world. (The word “cat” represents cats, as do my thoughts of cats. But cats themselves do not represent anything.) What makes this possible? How does language and thought succeed in being about anything? This problem – sometimes known as the “problem of intentionality” – is considered by many to be one of the most fundamental questions in both philosophy of mind and philosophy of language. In this unit, we will review some of the most important work on this topic. Questions include:

- Is the intentionality of language derived from the intentionality of thought?
- Where does the intentionality of thought come from?

We will conclude the course with a brief two-week unit exploring the psychological mechanisms that enable language acquisitions.

### **Grading:**

The grade will consist of four components, summarized below.

### *Attendance/Participation (15%)*

This course will be run like a seminar rather than a lecture. As such, discussion is absolutely vital. While I understand that some students are reluctant to speak in class, my aim is to create a welcoming and encouraging environment where everyone feels comfortable contributing.

In order to encourage participation, part of the participation grade is to post a short question/comment on the reading in a discussion forum on IVLE. The question/comment does not need to be long, but it should involve some sort of critical reflection – e.g., raising an objection, or pointing out a connection with some other material we’ve covered – rather than just summarizing the reading. You are also free to respond to others comments/questions. (The idea behind this is to offer different venues for participation, as well as ensuring that people are keeping up with the reading, and allowing me to get a sense of what issues are on people’s minds.) *I ask that students post one comment/question a week, and that they do so at least five hours before class starts (i.e., by 11am on Tuesdays). In weeks where some other assignment is due, there is no expectation to post.*

The participation/attendance breakdown is as follows:

- Attendance (5%)
- In-class participation (5%)
- Discussion forum posts (5%)

### *Short Response Paper (15%)*

The first paper assignment is to write a short written response to one of the articles we have covered thus far in the class. It should be focused on a particular argument in one of the papers – you should briefly summarize the argument, and then engage with it critically, by either offering an original criticism of it, or extending the argument in some way. The response should be between 600 and 800 words – the idea is to distill your commentary/criticism down to the essentials.

### *Presentation (10%)*

Two days will be reserved for student presentations (see the schedule below). The presentations are a warm-up for your final paper. In it, you should give a “pitch” of your main argument, and provide any background necessary to make sure your pitch is understood by your classmates. You should aim to present for about 10-15 minutes, and then field questions from the class for another 5-10 minutes. *You are expected to prepare a short handout to accompany your presentation, and you should email the handout to me at least three days (72 hours) before the presentation.* (Completing the handout and sending it in advance is part of the presentation grade.) The idea behind the presentation is to give you an opportunity get feedback on your ideas from your classmates – feedback that you can then incorporate into the final paper.

### *Paper (30%)*

The final paper is an opportunity to address a particular topic in depth. Your paper should demonstrate comprehension of the relevant literature, and also make some original

contribution (either an original criticism of one of the articles, an original defense of one of the article's positions, or a novel extension of some of the articles' ideas). The paper should be between 1500 and 2000 words. I will provide a list of potential paper topics closer to the due-date. (It is fine for you to write on a topic other than one of the suggested prompts, provided that you check with me beforehand.)

#### *Exam (30%)*

There will be a final exam on December 3<sup>rd</sup>. The exam will be open-book, and will consist of two short essays. Further details on the exam will be given closer to the exam date.

#### **General Expectations:**

Inquiry thrives on debate; disagreeing with others is encouraged! At the same time, please strive to be respectful of others when you voice your disagreement: avoid interrupting others, and avoid belittling or ridiculing their views.

A number of studies indicate that using electronic devices in class interferes with student learning. Therefore, *please do not use cell phones or computers during class*. (If I see students using computers or cell phones, I may call on them to answer to questions.)

I am happy to give reasonable extensions on assignments, provided you ask me at least 24 hours in advance of the assignment's deadline.

#### **Readings:**

You will be expected to have read the assigned texts in advance. All readings will be made available on **IVLE**.

We will be reading a few chapters from Tim Crane's *The Mechanical Mind*. Students who prefer to have a hardcopy of relevant texts may thus wish to purchase a copy, which can be ordered through the usual suspects.

#### *Further Resources:*

This course presupposes some familiarity with issues in philosophy of mind and philosophy of language. For students who do not have much background in philosophy of mind, Jaegwon Kim's *The Philosophy of Mind* is a useful resource. For students who do not have much background in philosophy of language, William Lycan's *Philosophy of Language* is a helpful starting place. For those interested in reading further on the work in cognitive science on these issues, Julie Sedivy's *Language in Mind: An Introduction to Psycholinguistics* is a state-of-the-art textbook.

A generally useful resource is the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, which provides useful overviews of a wide range of philosophical topics, written by experts in the field.

#### **Preliminary Schedule**

(Note: The following is subject to change as the course develops)

Week 1 (Aug 14<sup>th</sup>) – Introduction and Overview

**Unit 1:** Connections Between Language and Thought

Week 2 (Aug 21<sup>st</sup>) - Is Language Sufficient for Thought?

Required Reading:

Turing, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence” (focus on pp.443-452)

Crane, *The Mechanical Mind*, Chp. 3

Week 3 (Aug 28<sup>th</sup>) – Is Language Necessary for Thought? Part 1:

Do Non-Linguistic Animals Have Thoughts?

Required Reading:

Davidson, “Thought and Talk”

Gallistel, “Prelinguistic Thought”

Further Reading:

Andrews, “Animal Cognition”, SEP entry available at:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cognition-animal/>, esp. sections 2-4

Camp and Shupe, “Instrumental Reasoning in Nonhuman Animals”

Stich, “Do Animals Have Beliefs?”

Week 4 (Sept 4<sup>th</sup>) – Is Language Necessary for Thought? Part 2:

The Language of Thought Hypothesis

Required Readings:

Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson, “The Language of Thought”

(*The Philosophy of Mind and Cognition*, Chp. 10)

Crane, *The Mechanical Mind*, Chp. 4. (Feel free to skip the part on the modularity of mind.)

Further Readings:

Fodor, “Why there still has to be a Language of Thought”

Camp, “Thinking with Maps”

Blumson, “Mental Maps”

Short Response Paper due Monday October 10<sup>th</sup>

**Unit 2:** Explaining Linguistic and Mental Content

Week 5 (Sept 11<sup>th</sup>) – Reducing Linguistic Content to Mental Content, Part 1:

Grice on Speaker Meaning

Required Reading:

Grice, “Meaning”

Further Readings:

Lycan, *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*, chp. 7  
("Psychological Theories: Grice's Program")

Glüer and Pagin, "Meaning Theory and Autistic Speakers"

Week 6 (Sept 18<sup>th</sup>) – Reducing Linguistic Content to Mental Content, Part 2:  
Lewis on Meaning and Convention

Required Reading:

Lewis, "Languages and Language"

Further Reading:

Hawthorne, "A Note on 'Languages and Language'"

RECESS WEEK

Week 7 (Oct 2<sup>nd</sup>) – Theories of Mental Content, Part 1:  
Causal Theories of Content

Required Readings:

Crane, *The Mechanical Mind*, Chp. 5, pp.169-184. (Feel free to skim the last two pages, on Fodor's asymmetric dependence theory.)

Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson, *Philosophy of Mind and Cognition*, chp. 11, pp.203-210.

Further Readings:

Loewer, "A Guide to Naturalizing Semantics", pp.1-9.

Stampe, "Towards a Causal Theory of Linguistic Representation"

Adams & Aizawa, "Causal Theories of Mental Content", *SEP* entry, available at:  
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/content-causal/>

Week 8 (Oct 9<sup>th</sup>) – Theories of Mental Content, Part 2:  
Teleosemantic Theories of Content

Required Reading:

Millikan, "Biosemantics"

Neander, "Swampman Meets Swampcow"

Further Reading:

Crane, *The Mechanical Mind*, Chp. 5, pp.185-207. (Focus on pp.189-194.)

Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson, *Philosophy of Mind and Cognition*, chp. 11, pp.210-215.

**Interlude:** Student Presentations

Week 9 (Oct 16<sup>th</sup>) - Presentations

Week 10 (Oct 23<sup>rd</sup>) – Presentations

**Paper due Monday October 29<sup>th</sup>**

**Unit 3: Language Acquisition**

Week 11 (Oct 30<sup>th</sup>) – Language Acquisition, Part 1:  
Acquiring Sounds and Words

Required Reading:

Kuhl, “Early Language Acquisition: Cracking the Speech Code.”

Further Reading:

Saffran et al. “Statistical Learning by 8-month olds”

Week 12 (Nov 6<sup>th</sup>) – Language Acquisition, Part 2:  
Acquiring Sentences

Required Reading:

Pullum and Scholz, “Empirical Assessments of the Poverty of the Stimulus Argument”

Lidz et al, “What Infants Know About Syntax But Couldn’t Have Learned”

Further Reading:

Gomez et al, “Infant Artificial Language Learning and Language Acquisition”

Week 13 (Nov 13<sup>th</sup>) – Review/Catch-Up