

## ***Human Capacities***

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Graduate Seminar in Philosophy PHI 535 Fall 2022

Apart from linguistic ability, the capacities and practices that distinguish human beings include the following; making judgments about what to think and what to seek; reasoning from accepted premises to theoretical and practical conclusions; exhibiting a high level of consciousness—I shall say, sensibility—in our perceptions; undertaking commitments and forming bonds with one another; assigning and taking responsibility for what we say and do; and assuming the status and identity of persons.

The hypothesis explored in this seminar is that these features of our make-up and performance are identified by the functions they typically discharge, and specifically by those they discharge within the social environment that linguistic exchange establishes. Such exchange constitutes an ecosystem that provides a set of niches that those distinctive capacities and practices have evolved to fill.

We do not know how language and conversation emerged amongst our forebears and that issue is set aside in this seminar. The hypothesis explored is that however they appeared in human history, the best understanding of the targeted capacities and practices—the best philosophical account of what they consist in—represents them as intelligible responses to possibilities opened up by that development.

If this hypothesis is correct, then these capacities and practices have a place within our individual psychology primarily in virtue of their role in our social life. We rightly say that associated external activities express our mental attitudes or acts, as in holding that assertion expresses judgment, a promise expresses a resolution, or rebuke expresses blame. But the idea here is that the internal attitudes or acts could only materialize in creatures disposed and disciplined by social forms of life. The resulting theory of mind has an outside-in character: it puts the social before the mental, and contrasts with the inside-out view that takes the mental to have priority.

How to defend such a theory? In this seminar, we explore a sort of conceptual genealogy that figures frequently, but often namelessly, in philosophy. Imagine creatures otherwise like us—humanoids—who lack the capacities and practices listed, but come to have a language that enables them to exchange information. Would they have an incentive to develop practices that we would cast as making judgments, conducting reasoning, and exhibiting sensibility; undertaking commitments, holding one another responsible and, in an old term, personating: performing in the manner of persons? If so, then the rationale for their doing so will offer a plausible candidate for the primary function that the corresponding practice must serve in the human case.

A note for the skeptical. In the genealogy constructed, the humanoids will respond to the opportunities and pressures opened up by their linguistic environment in rational, culturally accumulating initiatives. But for all we need assume, our human forebears may have been naturally selected, perhaps under the prompting of successful initiatives, to respond on the same patterns. Consistently with such a difference between human beings

and their humanoid counterparts, the genealogy can still point us to the distinctive roles that the relevant capacities and practices play in human psychology.

While this seminar is motivated by the instructor's views, and supported by a work in progress, the topics covered are central to the philosophy of mind, and there will be readings from others provided for each session. It will also try to connect the philosophical anthropology developed here with normative issues, explaining the appearance of valuing and the role that an ideal of respect must assume among conversive, conversable creatures. The precise topics and questions covered may vary, however, depending on the interests of participants.

Here, subject to revision, is a tentative outline of the topics to be covered, with an indication of the week or weeks of the seminar that are likely to be devoted to each.

### ***1. Conceptual genealogy***

How to characterize the method we hope to follow. Examples of it at work: Hart on law, Lewis on convention. The assumptions we must make about humanoid nature, assuming a similarity with humans. The complementarity with evolutionary theory.

Readings:

Williams Genealogy

Neale Paul Grice and the Philosophy of Language

Tomasello Joint Intentionality

Sterelny The Informational Commonwealth.

### ***2/3. Judgment and belief***

How to characterize assertion. The linkage with intentionally trying to make a judgment. The linkage between judgment and belief. Knowing what one judges to be so and what one believes is the case. Making judgments and thinking. Situating the picture within a framework of credences and utilities. The possibility of hope and trust

Readings:

Goldberg, Recent Work on Assertion

Dennett, Intentional Systems and How to Change your Mind

Camp, Putting Thoughts to Work

Eriksson and Hajek What are degrees of belief?

McGeer and Pettit The Empowering Theory of Trust.

### ***4/5. Reasoning and rule-following***

All animals must display a certain rationality. But only human beings appear to reason in the sense in which this requires intentional effort. How do rationality and reasoning relate? What is the pay-off for reasoning? Is the rule-following it implements problematic? Is the basic rule-following that judgment and reasoning presuppose even more problematic?

Readings:

Broome Reasoning to be Rational

Boghossian Inference

Carroll What the Tortoise said to Achilles

Mercier and Sperber Why do humans reason?

Wittgenstein Philosophical Investigations Paras 172-241

Kripke The Wittgensteinian Paradox

## **6. Sensibility and sentience**

Perception, common in many animals, essentially involves sentience; it contrasts in that way with 'blindsight', as it is traditionally conceived. The effect on perception of judgment and reasoning: finer discrimination, attentional control, and an appearance-reality divide. The world of appearance savored as such. The artistic reproduction of appearance.

Readings:

Dretske Perception without Awareness

Dretske Experience as Representation

Graziano How to Build Visual Consciousness

Siegel The Contents of Perception

Byrne and Siegel Rich or Thin

Nagel What is it like to be a Bat?

## **7/8. Commitment and valuing**

Reporting one's attitudes leaves open some salient excuses for failing to live up to them, so that the words are cheap. Avowing an attitude removes the misleading mind excuse and pledging an intention also leaves open the changed mind excuse. Both are commitments: more expensive forms of communication. Why commitment of that kind appeals and how it may figure in speaking for oneself or others too. The notion of committing to a desire, assigning it a robust influence, and its connection with valuing. The variety of values.

Readings:

Nesse Natural Selection and the Capacity for Subjective Commitment

Lewis Scorekeeping in a Language *Game* or Stalnaker Assertion

Boyle Two Kinds of Self-knowledge

Bratman Valuing and the Will

Smith Moral Realism

Sayre-McCord, On Hume's 'General Point of View'

## **9/10. Responsibility and free will**

How commitment introduces exhortation. The assumptions of exhortation. Holding responsible in the wake of exhortation and disappointment. The extension to self-exhortation in various modes. The assumption of freewill. The self-exhorted agent and the ascription of freewill.

Readings:

Strawson Freedom and Resentment

Smith Rational Capacities

McGeer Scaffolding Agency: A Proleptic Theory of the Reactive Attitudes

Williams Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame

List Freewill, Determinism and the Possibility of Doing Otherwise

## **11/12. Personhood and respect**

What features distinguish persons among agents? Why commissive, conversable agents constitute persons. The requirements of personhood, on this account. The relation between persons and their self or selves. Personhood and respect. In what does respect consist? And why is it valuable?

Readings:

Daniel Dennett Conditions of Personhood, represented mainly a capacity-based theory

David Velleman The Genesis of Shame (esp ss5-6)

Parfit Personal Identity and Rationality

Boyle Mirror Self-recognition and Self-identification

Strawson Against Narrativity

Darwall Two Concepts of Respect

Carter The Basis of Respect