

# Origins of Mind: Philosophical Issues in Cognitive Development

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## The Challenge

Explain how humans come to know about objects, causes, words, numbers, colours, actions and minds.

## What will I learn about?

Recent scientific breakthroughs about the emergence of minds in development, and the philosophical issues arising from these.

Also issues like innateness, modularity and pre-linguistic cognition.

## How is it organised?

The course will be organised around domains of knowledge. The topics to be covered are:

1. Social Interaction without Words
2. Objects and How They Interact
3. Numbers
4. Seeing and Talking about Colours
5. Words and Other Communicative Tools

6. Actions: Teleology and Motor Awareness

7. Mindreading

The topics are chosen so that each set of developmental findings is linked to a philosophical issue. For instance, research on knowledge of objects gives bite to questions about modularity and tacit knowledge.

## How will it be taught?

I'm planning sixteen lectures (two lectures most weeks) and five discussion meetings plus 4–5 small group tutorials involving a mix of presentations, essays and peer review.

## What will I have to do?

Write 3–5 short essays over the term (on which you'll get feedback).

Read lots of papers, including quite a bit of developmental psychology.

Learn to integrate philosophy with psychology.

## How will it be assessed?

As an undergraduate, you can either write a 2500 word essay or take a 2 hour exam. MA students write a 5000 word essay.

## Is there a web page?

<http://origins-of-mind.butterfill.com>

## Can you suggest some reading?

There's a list on the back of this handout.

## Reading Suggestions by Topic

### 1. Social Interaction without Words

Could social interaction enable cognitive development?<sup>19,18,8,2,16,25</sup>

### 2. Objects and How They Interact

When can infants first know things about objects they aren't perceiving?<sup>17,1,11</sup>

### 3. Numbers

How might abilities based on core knowledge enable the emergence in development of knowledge proper?<sup>28,27,10,6</sup>

### 4. Seeing and Talking about Colours

How do children acquire colour concepts and colour words—concepts and words for red, blue and green, say?<sup>23,12,13</sup>

## 5. Words and Other Communicative Tools

What comes first in development, knowledge or language?<sup>26,4,22,14</sup>

## 6. Actions: Teleology and Motor Awareness

Which events do infants take to be actions? And how do they understand the relation between actions and the goals to which they are directed?<sup>5,7,21,3</sup>

## 7. Mindreading

What is involved in representing belief?<sup>20,24,15,9</sup>

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