

PHIL 363

Philosophy and Cognitive  
Science

Lecture One (Part One)

Introduction

# What is Cognition?

Thinking, reasoning, inferring, choosing,  
deciding, willing, intending, loving,  
fearing, hoping, wishing, imagining,  
seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting,  
feeling, experiencing, dreaming...

# What is Cognitive Science?

- Interdisciplinary science of cognition
  - Philosophy
  - Cognitive Psychology
  - Computer Science (Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Robotics)
  - Linguistics
  - Anthropology
  - Neuroscience
    - Also researchers and theorists in related fields such as education, developmental psychology, ethology

# What is the Role of Philosophy?

- CONTROVERSIAL
  - 1) Radical divide between philosophy and the natural sciences
  - 2) There is a continuum between philosophy and the natural sciences

# What is the Role of Philosophy?

## 1) RADICAL DIVIDE between philosophy and the natural sciences

- Soul / matter
- value / matter
- meaning / matter
- The findings of science aren't relevant to philosophical questions
  - Science misses the point
- Philosophical theories are irrelevant for science
  - Philosophical theories aren't testable

# What is the Role of Philosophy?

- 2) CONTINUUM between philosophy and the natural sciences
  - Reciprocal Relationship
    - Look to science for data that is relevant for answering philosophical questions
      - Extreme view - Science as data collection for philosophical theorist
    - Look for philosophy for questions, hypotheses, and / or theories
      - Extreme view - No more philosophy with scientific progress

- In doing science we have to start somewhere
- Better to start from someplace that seems plausible than from someplace that seems implausible...
- So lets start with some `common-sense' intuitions

# Mental States as Propositional Attitudes



# Mental States as Propositional Attitudes

- Each of these mental states seems to be ABOUT something
  - Thinking that  $p$ , reasoning that  $p$ , inferring that  $p$ , choosing  $p$ , deciding  $p$ , willing  $p$ , intending  $p$ , loving  $p$ , fearing that  $p$ , hoping that  $p$ , wishing that  $p$ , imagining that  $p$ , seeing  $p$ , hearing  $p$ , smelling  $p$ , tasting  $p$ , feeling  $p$ , experiencing  $p$ , dreaming  $p$ ...

- What they are about is the CONTENT of the state
- Contents are thought to be PROPOSITIONAL
- Propositions are (for our purposes) abstract meanings or informational contents

# What is a Proposition?

- 'the sun is hot'
  - 'hot, the sun is'
  - Sentences in other languages that are synonymous
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- Are different sentences, phrases, or expressions but they have the same meaning, informational, or propositional content

# Features of the View

- One person can entertain the same propositional content at different points in time
- Different people can entertain the same propositional content
- Speakers of different languages can entertain the same propositional content

# Folk Psychology

(aka Belief-Desire Psychology)

# Folk Psychology

## (`common sense' psychology)

- We can make fairly good predictions about what people will do by appealing to what they believe (the way they represent the world to be) and what they desire (the way they are motivated to alter the world)
- We also explain what they have done by appealing to what they believe (represent) and what they desire (are motivated to do)
- It seems common-sense that `an agent will act so as to obtain their strongest desire under the assumption that their beliefs are true'
- No other scientific theory seems to capture the relevant predictions

# Questions:

- What enables us to attribute mental states to others / employ folk-psychology?
- What does this ability show us about the structure of the mind?
- What is the status of folk-psychology compared to scientific theories in physics, chemistry, biology, cognitive psychology etc
- What does folk psychology show us about the nature of mental states?
- Are (all?) mental states usefully thought of as propositional attitudes?