

The University of Western Ontario  
Department of Philosophy

**Philosophy 405G/574B**  
**Problems in Philosophy of Mind: Autism and the Philosophy of Mind**

**Instructor:** Robert J. Stainton

**Class Days and Hours:** Th 2:30-5:20 p.m. (TC340)

**Office:** Talbot 412

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**Office Hours:** Wednesdays, 3:30 – 4:30 p.m.

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This seminar will focus on the nature of autism and its implications for philosophy, especially philosophy of mind. The course will address in detail both a topic, autism, and a methodology – viz., deploying empirical work from the cognitive sciences in philosophy. With respect to the topic, we will begin with a survey of clinical and other empirical work on the symptoms and causes of autism; we will then turn to the implications of autism for issues like theory-theory versus simulation theory, the modularity of mind, nativism, the role of second order intentions in linguistic meaning, language-thought relations, and the importance of empathy for moral agency. Previous familiarity with research on autism will not be presupposed. Existing familiarity with philosophy of mind is, however, essential.

**TEXTS:**

*Books*

- Uta Frith (2003). *Autism: Explaining the Enigma*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Simon Baron-Cohen (1995). *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Course pack #M8036

*Articles*

- Kanner, L. (1943) “Autistic disturbances of affective contact”. *Nervous Child* 2: 217-250.
- Asperger, H. (1944) “Autistic psychopathology in childhood”. In U. Frith (ed.)(1991) *Autism and Asperger Syndrome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 37-92.
- Baltaxe, C. (1977). “Pragmatic deficits in the language of autistic adolescents”. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology* 2: 176-180.
- Leslie, A. (1987). “Pretense and Representation: The Origins of ‘theory of mind’”. *Psychological Review* 94: 412-426.
- Gordon, R. (1986) “Folk Psychology as Simulation”. *Mind and Language* 1: 158-171.
- Grice, H.P. (1957) “Meaning”. *Philosophical Review* 66: 377-388.
- Gluer, K. & P. Pagin (2003) “Meaning Theory and Autistic Speakers”. *Mind and Language* 18(1): 23-51.
- Davidson, D. (1975) “Thought and Talk”. In his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 155-170.
- Andrews, K. (2002) “Interpreting Autism”. *Philosophical Psychology* 15(3): 317-332.

- Garfield, J., C. Peterson & T. Perry (2001). “Social Cognition, Language Acquisition and The Development of the Theory of Mind”. *Mind and Language* 16:5 494-541.
- Searle, J.R. (1979). “Metaphor”. In A. Ortony (ed.) *Metaphor and Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 92-123.
- Sperber, D. & D. Wilson (1981). “Irony and the use-mention distinction”. In P. Cole (ed.) *Radical Pragmatics*. New York: Academic Press, pp. 295-318.
- Happé, F. (1995). “Understanding Minds and Metaphors: Insights from the Study of Figurative Language in Autism”. *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* 10(4): 275-295.
- Kennett, J. (2002). “Autism, Empathy and Moral Agency” *Philosophical Quarterly* 52(208): 340-357.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Participation: 5%

Weekly Argument Outline and Questions: 25%

In-Class Presentation: 30%

Essay: 40%

- Undergraduate essays: 2500 words
- Graduate student essays: 4000 words
- Essays are due April 16<sup>th</sup> by 4:30 p.m.

### **OUTLINE:**

#### **Part One: Introduction**

- a) Some topics
  - Symptoms and causes of autism
  - Implications of autism
    - Modularity
    - Nativism
    - Representations (“theory”) or abilities (“simulation”)?
    - Intention-based theories of meaning
    - Language and thought
    - Semantics/pragmatics boundary (e.g., metaphor and irony)
    - Moral agency and empathy
- b) A method: Using cognitive science in philosophy
- c) Background from Philosophy of Mind

#### **Part Two: Symptoms and Causes**

- a) Symptoms
  - Readings: Kanner, Asperger, Baltaxe, Frith (chaps 1, 4, 7 & 8)
- b) Overview of possible causes
  - Readings: Frith (chaps 5, 6, 9, 10 & 12)
- c) Mindblindness: Evolutionary psychology, nativism and modularity
  - Readings: Baron-Cohen (chaps 1-5)
- d) Theory-theory versus simulation

- Readings: Leslie, Gordon

### **Part Three: Philosophical Implications**

- a) Intention-based theories of meaning
  - Readings: Grice, Gluer & Pagin, Davidson, Andrews, Frith (review chap 7)
- b) Innateness (again), language and thought: Garfield, Peterson & Perry
- c) The semantics/pragmatics boundary
  - Readings: Searle, Sperber & Wilson, Happé
- d) Moral agency and empathy
  - Readings: Kennett

### **THIS OUTLINE IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE, GIVEN SUFFICIENT PRIOR NOTICE.**

You are responsible for ensuring that you have successfully completed all course prerequisites and that you have not taken an antirequisite course. Lack of prerequisites may not be used as basis of appeal. If you are not eligible for a course, you may be removed from it at any time, and you will receive no fee adjustment. These decisions cannot be appealed.

*Prerequisite:* Philosophy 246F/G or the former Philosophy 332E.3 hours, half course. (Previous familiarity with research on autism will not be presupposed. Existing familiarity with philosophy of mind is, however, essential.)

*Antirequisite:* Philosophy 475F: Problems in Philosophy (Autism and the Philosophy of Mind)