Representation and Meta-representation

PHIL878A – Wednesdays 4.30-7.00 pm in Skinner 1116

Instructor: Peter Carruthers
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Course Outline
There have been extensive debates about the place of intentional / representational content in the natural world. Although content is routinely appealed to in cognitive science, there is debate about whether (and when) this is explanatorily necessary, or is a mere gloss. There is also debate about what content itself is, and whether it can be reductively defined or explained. In addition, there are debates about what it takes for intentional content itself to be represented—e.g. by preverbal infants or nonhuman animals—whether these contents belong to the mind of another creature (mindreading) or oneself (metacognition). The instructor’s hope is that greater clarity about the nature of representation may help settle the question of when representations are in turn represented.

Note that this seminar will be an opinionated introduction to debates about the nature and role representation in cognitive science, together with debates about representations of representations (in both mindreading and metacognition). It will not be a dispassionate survey. In consequence, some of the assigned readings may be by the instructor himself. However, this does not mean that students are required (or in any way pressured) to share his vision. In particular, you should not be afraid to defend conflicting views in discussion and in your term-papers.

Course Arrangements
The first class will be on Wednesday August 28. Thereafter (starting in week #2, September 4), for the first twelve weeks or so of the course (depending on the number of students registered for credit), classes will have the following format:

1) The first two-thirds of each session will be devoted to student-led discussion of the reading material for that week. Depending on numbers, one or more members of the class will be designated to lead and chair the discussion. (You can expect to lead two or three sessions in total.) But everyone will need to read the material carefully, and everyone will need to cooperate to make it work.

2) Following a short break, in the concluding 50 minutes of each session the instructor will then introduce, contextualize, and/or critique the material to be read for the week following. The instructor’s powerpoint slides will be made available in ELMS in advance, so that you can take notes directly onto your own copy as the lecture proceeds if you wish.

The final few sessions of the course will be reserved for presentation and discussion of draft student term-papers. A schedule will get finalized early in the Fall (once the number of students registered for credit is known) and posted on the ELMS site.

Copies of most of the basic readings for the course will be deposited in ELMS. (More may need to be researched for purposes of writing the term-paper, of course.) Some may be experimental in nature, or reviews of experimental studies. Don’t get too bogged down in the technical details, and
don’t be afraid to skim where necessary. Our task is to try to figure out what the results mean for different theories of representation and/or meta-representation.

**Course Assessment**

Assessment for the course will be driven almost entirely by the final term paper. This will need to be drafted in outline in time for oral presentation to the class during the final few sessions of term.

Assuming there are three presenters per class, plan on 25 minutes for presentation and a little under 25 minutes for discussion. Presentations should be treated as if for a conference, using either powerpoint or a handout.

All for-credit students should make an appointment to meet with me to discuss an abstract of the intended term paper, as well as plans for your oral presentation, sometime during the two weeks prior to your scheduled presentation. The schedule will be organized by student seniority, with first-year students going last in the sequence.

Following your oral presentation, initial drafts of your paper will then need to be submitted to the instructor (by email attachment please) for critical comment by **Tuesday December 24**. They will be returned with comments before the end of the month, and final versions should then be submitted for grading (again by email attachment) by **January 27** (the first day of Spring Semester).

The final version of the paper should be of normal article length (between 7,000 and 9,000 words inclusive of all notes and references). Your first draft should be a bit shorter, to allow for expansion in response to feedback.

You can set your own question for the term paper, provided that it is drawn from among the topics covered by the seminar. You could either choose a question that is covered in one or two sessions, or a question that links together different elements of the course, or runs as a theme throughout it.

Grading for the seminar will be 20% for the oral presentation and subsequent handling of class discussion (judged both for content and for presentational skills), 80% for the final term paper.

**Tentative Schedule & Readings**

**Aug 28** – Introductions, introduction, & intro to the first topic

Readings: none

Presenter: Peter Carruthers

1) **Sept 4** – Does cog sci need representations?


Presenter:

2) **Sept 11** – Reducing representational content

3) **Sept 18** – Representation as basic

4) **Sept 25** – Intention and motor representation

5) **Oct 2** – Shea’s book #1: functions for representation
   Readings: chs. 2 & 3

6) **Oct 9** – Shea’s book #2: information & correspondence
   Readings: chs. 4 & 5

7) **Oct 16** – Shea’s book #3: how content explains
   Readings: chs. 6 & 8

8) **Oct 23** – Concepts

9) **Oct 30** – Representing representations in others #1

Presenter:

10) **Nov 6** – Representing representations in others #2
[3] Carruthers, P. (draft). Representing the mind as such in infancy.

Presenter:

11) **Nov 13** – Representing representations in oneself

Presenter:
Student presentation #1:

**Nov 20** – paper presentations
Student Presentation #2:
Student Presentation #3:
Student Presentation #4:

**Nov 26** – NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING BREAK

**Dec 4** – paper presentations
Student Presentation #5:
Student Presentation #6:
Student Presentation #7:

Dec 11 – possible extra class for additional student presentations

Dec 24 – draft term-papers due

Jan 27 – completed term-papers due