

PHIL 4080
Fall 2013-2014
M 2:30-5:30

M. A. Khalidi
Ross S 438
Office Hours: TBA

**Topics in the Philosophy of Mind:
The Innate Mind**

Do we have any innate ideas? The question is at least as old as Plato and has attracted the attention of numerous philosophers since (Descartes, Locke, and Leibniz, to name a few). But in recent times, there has been a flurry of interest in the topic of innate ideas. After looking at some historical antecedents, this course will focus on the contemporary literature, examining the conceptual issues as well as the empirical evidence. Readings will be drawn from contemporary work in philosophy, as well as linguistics, psychology, and related disciplines.

Renewed interest in this topic in contemporary philosophical thought is due in large part to Chomsky's work in linguistics, which suggested that human beings have an innate capacity to learn human languages. Among linguists and psychologists, it has become widely accepted that we have an innate disposition to acquire knowledge of some grammatical structures and not others. Linguists and philosophers have also postulated that some semantic knowledge is also innate, i.e. that some concepts and connections among concepts are innate. More recently, psychologists and cognitive scientists have proposed that our innate endowment goes further than either syntax or semantics, and may extend to such realms as our knowledge of spatial relations, solidity and permanence of objects, basic arithmetical relations, morality, social interactions, and so on. The existence of such innate concepts and capacities has been taken by some to explain the existence of purported semantic, cultural, and other universals in the human species. We will discuss what implications this might have for an account of human nature and for our self-conception as a species.

Among the philosophical questions to be discussed are the following. What is it for an idea or concept or belief or cognitive capacity to be innate? What kind of evidence is required for concluding that an idea or belief is innate? How strong is the evidence for the claim that some of our ideas and beliefs are innate? What is the difference between acquiring an idea on the basis of input from the environment and having an idea triggered by environmental input? Are all innate ideas tacit and unconscious or are some of them explicit and conscious? Should our innate mental states be thought of as ideas and beliefs, or simply as capacities and constraints? Do innate ideas differ from learned ideas on the basis of their content or just the means by which they are acquired? Does it make sense to talk about dispositional ideas? In which domains do we have innate ideas? How far-ranging is our innate endowment? What implications does the doctrine of innate ideas have for the search for human universals and for our conception of human nature? Does it make sense to speak of innate mental contents, or does this rest on a mistaken view of the relation of nature to nurture?

Course Requirements

Comments & Participation (30%): Each student will be required to post a 100-word comment on Moodle each week concerning the readings for that week. These comments should be posted by 11:00 pm on the evening before the class in question and will be worth 20% of the final grade for the course. Late comments will not be accepted and full credit will not be given unless the student is also present in class. To get full credit, students must post a total of 10 comments during the semester. The remaining 10% will be based on class participation and attendance. Anything over one unexcused class absence will adversely affect your grade; anything over three will lead to a failing grade in the course.

Take-Home Midterm Exam (30%): The midterm exam will be a take-home involving two short essays on a choice of topics that will be distributed at least one week in advance, due Friday, Oct 18.

Term Paper (40%): Term paper topics will be distributed two weeks before the paper is due. Further details (due date, length requirement) will be specified in the instructions included with paper topics.

Late Penalties and Excuses

If you are unable to fulfill any of the requirements for this course by the announced deadlines, you must contact me as soon as possible and always before the deadline in question. If you have a legitimate excuse backed up by supporting documentation (e.g. a medical emergency), your penalties will be reduced or (in some cases) waived. The key is to contact me as soon as possible when a problem arises.

Reading Schedule

The readings listed below should be done before the relevant class and a comment on the readings is due by 11:00 pm on Monday evening before the class in question.

Week 1 Sept 10	Introduction	
Week 2 Sept 17	Historical Antecedents (1)	Plato, <i>Meno</i> (80d-86c and 97e-98b; pp.10-18 and 26-27) Descartes, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> (Meditation III)
Week 3 Sept 24	Historical Antecedents (2)	"The Locke-Leibniz Debate," edited by R.M. Adams, in S. Stich (ed.), <i>Innate Ideas</i> (University of California Press, 1975) R.M. Adams, "Where do Our Ideas Come From?" in S. Stich (ed.), <i>Innate Ideas</i> (University of California Press, 1975)
Week 4 Oct 1	Historical Antecedents (3)	N. Chomsky, <i>Cartesian Linguistics</i> (excerpts) in S. Stich (ed.), <i>Innate Ideas</i> (University of California Press, 1975) J. Samet, "The Historical Controversies Surrounding Innateness," <i>Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i>
Week 5 Oct 8	Innateness: The Very Idea (1)	S. Stich, "Introduction: The Idea of Innateness," in Stich (ed.), <i>Innate Ideas</i> (University of California Press, 1975) E. Sober, "Innate Knowledge," <i>Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i>
Week 6 Oct 15	Language	R. Jackendoff, <i>Patterns in the Mind</i> , Chapters 1-3 F. Cowie, "Innateness and Language," <i>Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i> (excerpts, up to section 3.3.3.)

Take-Home Midterm Due: Oct 18

<p>Week 7 Oct 22</p>	<p>Objects, Space, and Motion</p>	<p>R. Baillargeon, "Innate Ideas Revisited: For a Principle of Persistence in Infants' Physical Reasoning," <i>Perspectives on Psychological Science</i> 3 (2008), 2-13</p> <p>E. Spelke & K. Kinzler, "Core Knowledge," <i>Developmental Science</i> 10 (2007), 89-96</p>
<p>Week 8 Oct 29</p>	<p>Numbers and Arithmetic</p>	<p>K. Wynn, "Evidence against Empiricist Accounts of the Origins of Numerical Knowledge," <i>Mind & Language</i> 7 (1992), 315-332</p> <p>S. Laurence and E. Margolis, "Linguistic Determinism and the Innate Basis of Number," in P. Carruthers et. al. (eds.), <i>The Innate Mind</i> vol. 3 (Oxford University Press, 2008)</p>
<p>Week 9 Nov 5</p>	<p>Morality</p>	<p>S. Dwyer, "How Good Is the Linguistic Analogy?" in P. Carruthers et. al. (eds.), <i>The Innate Mind</i> vol. 2 (Oxford University Press, 2007)</p> <p>J. Haidt & C. Joseph, "The Moral Mind: How Five Sets of Innate Intuitions Guide the Development of Many Culture-Specific Virtues...", in P. Carruthers et. al. (eds.), <i>The Innate Mind</i> vol. 3 (Oxford University Press, 2008)</p>
<p>Week 10 Nov 12</p>	<p>Religion</p>	<p>R. McCauley, and E. Cohen, "Cognitive Science and the Naturalness of Religion," <i>Philosophy Compass</i> 4 (2010), 1-14.</p> <p>P. Bloom, "Religion, Morality, Evolution," <i>Annual Review of Psychology</i> 63 (2012), 179-199.</p>
<p>Week 11 Nov 19</p>	<p>Innate Gender Differences?</p>	<p>Debate between S. Pinker and E. Spelke on alleged innate differences between the cognitive capacities of males and females: http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/debate05/debate05_index.html</p> <p>C. Fine, <i>Delusions of Gender</i> (excerpts)</p>
<p>Week 12 Nov 26</p>	<p>Innateness: The Very Idea (2)</p>	<p>P. Griffiths, "What Is Innateness?" <i>Monist</i> 85 (2002), 70-85</p> <p>R. Samuels, "Is Innateness a Confused Notion?" in P. Carruthers et. al. (eds.), <i>The Innate Mind</i> vol. 3 (Oxford University Press, 2007)</p>

Moodle

All registered students will be automatically added to the course's Moodle site. If you have not been added, please email me as soon as possible. Important announcements concerning the course and course policies will be posted on Moodle, so you are responsible for checking the Moodle site on a regular basis. All readings for this course will also be accessed via Moodle and must be downloaded and printed out; they are not available in any other form. In short, it is crucial that you sign on to Moodle immediately and check the Moodle course website very regularly throughout the semester.

Policy on Email

Email is an effective way of communicating with me and I would encourage you to send me an email message if you have a relatively straightforward question concerning course requirements or something of that kind. (You should also email me if some emergency arises and you have to miss a class deadline. But I should stress that any such contact needs to take place in advance of the deadline in question. Otherwise, there is very little chance that you will be excused in whole or in part.) However, based on past experience, I don't think email is a very good way of asking substantive questions about class material. If you have such questions and you do not get a chance to ask them in class or don't think that they've been satisfactorily answered in class, I would strongly encourage you to make an appointment to come see me during office hours. I find that a substantive philosophical discussion is hard to carry out over email and it's usually much more productive to conduct it face-to-face. Incidentally, *please include your full name* and student number in all email correspondence. I won't answer unsigned emails!

Office Hours

My regular office hours this semester will be on Mon 10:30-11:30 and Tues 1:30-2:30, and my office is located in Ross S 438, down the hall from the Department of Philosophy office. I may also be able to meet at other times during the week if regular office hours do not work for you. So please contact me by email if you would like to arrange a different time. Even if you intend to show up during my regular office hours, it is preferable to contact me beforehand so as to avoid a wait.

Access and Disability

Students with health-related, learning, physical, psychiatric, or sensory disabilities who require reasonable accommodations in teaching style or evaluation methods should discuss their concerns with me as soon as possible so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

Academic Honesty

All students are expected to abide strictly by standards of academic honesty. If you have not done so, please familiarize yourselves with the University Senate Policy on Academic Honesty:

<http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/policies/>

Please also consult the letter on Academic Honesty from the Department of Philosophy, which is posted on the Moodle website for this course.