

Essay Questions for Social Cognition (PH364)

In the early stages of writing your essay you should discuss what to read with the lecturer. You should also discuss an outline of your essay, and possibly a draft, both with peers and with the lecturer.

Mid-term essay (15%)

The limit is 1500 words. Shorter is better, all other things being equal.

You may only answer questions from this list. If you wish to formulate your own question, discuss it with the lecturer and ask him to add it to this list.

What if anything can we perceive of others' emotions? (Permissible variation: Can we perceive others' emotions from their facial expressions?)

How could someone come to know facts about another's beliefs, desires and other mental states on the basis of evidence about events and states of affairs which could be known without knowing what any particular individual believes, desires or intends, nor the contents of any of her mental states?

Consider the intentional stance as characterised by Dennett. In what sense, if any, is it true that, as Dennett claims (1987, p. 21), 'people actually use this strategy'?

Suppose there were a community of False Believers—that is, individuals whose beliefs were mainly false. What if anything would prevent their minds from being intelligible to others?

Do nonhuman animals represent others' mental states? (Permissible variation: How might we establish whether non-human animals represent mental states?)

What role, if any, does projection play in mindreading?

Assessed essay (85%)

The limit is 2500 words. Shorter is better, all other things being equal.

You are encouraged to formulate your own question and discuss it with the lecturer, who may choose to add it to this list. You may only answer questions from this list.

What makes minds and actions intelligible to others?

Can we perceptually experience others' actions?

Is there a role for motor processes and representations in understanding others' actions?

What evidence bears on questions about whether we can perceive others' mental states?

Does human social cognition involve multiple models of the mental?

What is the evidential basis for ascriptions of thought and action and how does the evidence support the ascriptions?

What evidence could show that nonhuman animals represent others' mental states? Is any such evidence currently available?

Do abilities to interact with others make available routes to knowledge of others' minds and actions which would be closed to mere observers?

What is simulation and what is its role in social cognition?

What is social cognition for?