

Periodic evaluation of courses. FIL2108 "Philosophy of Psychology"

1. Introduction

FIL2108 was offered for the first time in Fall 2020 after a restructuring of the courses offered at the 2000 level. This is the first periodical evaluation of this course. The evaluation is based on: the FS754.001 statistic official student data, the official course description, an online student evaluation of the course done after the course had ended, and my own experiences in teaching this course. Important to note: in Fall 2020 the university was heavily affected by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, and the course as a consequence was fully offered online, on Canvas and Zoom. The course was in Fall 2020 taught in English.

The course description describes the course content as follows:

In this course, you will engage in more depth with issues in the philosophy of mind as well as with philosophical questions at the foundations of scientific psychology, cognitive science, and the neurosciences. It focuses on core topics in the philosophy of psychology and cognitive science. On the one hand, the course will engage with philosophical questions about psychology. We will, for example, consider the nature of psychological explanation, the relationship between psychological and neuroscientific explanations, the nature and the role of mental representations, predictive coding and Bayesian models of the brain. On the other hand, we will look at how, if at all, psychological research can help to answer traditional philosophical questions. Case studies may include: rationality, animal minds, the nature of concepts, psychiatric disorders, the self, moral psychology, or consciousness.

2. Evaluation

a. Penum

The penum for the course was selected as selected chapters from the following two books: Weiskopf, D., & Adams, F. (2015). *An introduction to the philosophy of psychology*. Cambridge University Press, and Andrews, K. (2020). *The animal mind: An introduction to the philosophy of animal cognition*, Routledge; in addition, the course used articles (mostly optional) that were made available on canvas. In general, this penum worked well. Some students found the Animal Mind case study especially interesting, others though were less interested in that. It may be a good idea to select a little fewer different topics and less text in the future. One may slightly change topics from year to year.

b. Teaching

The course content was divided into 14 modules. Each of these had a topic like "Thinking", "Consciousness" or "Psychological explanation". The first 10 modules corresponded to one week each, for the last two weeks students could choose between two different modules. Each module was designed to contain (a) a short description of the topic, (b) a reading guide, (c) a lecture composed of a mixture of recorded videos, text, and links to online material, (d) an online discussion group, and (e) a zoom discussion. In addition, messages were regularly posted on canvas to point students to further online material or to engage them with questions and ideas. Online quizzes were originally planned as well, but only one of them was done. Students were required to participate in 6 online discussions, and submit one draft of a critical response paper about half way through the semester. The exam consisted of a revised version of that critical response paper and an essay.

Generally, the structure of the online environment, and the division between lecturing and discussion worked well. Students found the teaching well structured, engaging, and clear. Some students commented especially positively on how the course made use of the online environment. On the other hand, students did miss physical meetings. One might, in the future, consider combining something like this online structure with discussion oriented physical meetings (which would replace the zoom meetings), Generally 14 modules was arguably a bit too much both for students and teacher. 12 would have sufficed.

c. Resources and Infrastructure

As mentioned, the course was conducted on Canvas and zoom. Generally, this worked very well. By posting lectures in video and text format, and divided into many relatively small pieces, students engaged with the material often and throughout the week (confirmed through continuous use of the Canvas site). It was good to keep the zoom meetings focused on discussions. For that it was especially important to use specific tasks for the students to perform in breakout rooms. The students there developed quite good discussion abilities and

engaged with each others. Still some students missed the depth of discussions in physical meetings. With regard to making materials accessible, it was found to work well to upload it directly in the canvas room.

d. Examen

What worked especially well with regard to examination was how it was possible use the online discussions to teach students aspects of writing and argumentation, and also be able to give them feedback on a draft of one piece of writing. This had a very positive effect on the quality of the students writing at the end of the semester. The structure of the course and the structure of the examination worked well together and resulted in an excellent learning curve by the students.

3. Learning outcomes

The learning outcomes were formulated as:

The aim is to give the participants:

- *an in-depth knowledge of some central issues in philosophy of psychology and cognitive science*
- *the ability to analyse different philosophical views on the topics covered*
- *the ability to express themselves in academic forms, both orally and in writing.*

This describes the aims fairly well. On the other hand, almost 80 % of students commented that the course taught them to analyze problems. Arguably, problem analysis and argumentation could be a part of the learning outcomes as well.

4. Statistics and other assessment

a. Statistics

A total of 36 students initially enrolled. 6 of those students did not meet (“ikke møtt”). 23 successfully took the exam (5 did not take the exam, one had a doctors attest, and one had “stryk”). Of these, 4 came from HFB-FIDE, 2 from HFB-EURAM, 11 from HFB-FIL, 5 from the Honours programme, 1 from lingvistikk, and 7 were others.

Grades were distributed as follows: 22 % A, 57 % B, 17 % C, 4 % D

There was no “klage”

b. Feedback for teachers and administration

Student evaluation generally were very positive. The focus on philosophy of psychology worked well. Even though no student commented on this, some of the texts in the Weiskopf and Adams book are difficult and one might consider switching to a different textbook, if such a book became available in the future.

c. How does the course work in the course group it is placed in

The course seems to be well placed at the 2000 level. It could have the potential to also interest more students from psychology and neuroscience in the future.

d. Is the course placed at the right level and in the right semester

The course is placed at the right level, as it is good to have a background either at the 1000 level philosophy of mind, or a series of courses in psychology or neuroscience. The course is suited for students with both backgrounds. I didn't see any problem with the course running in the Fall semesters.

5. Where any changes made since the last evaluation

This course was given for the first time, so no changes were made.

6. Proposals for improvement

This course seems to me a good addition to the course portfolio offered. It would be good to ensure that this course also fits well with the study problems in psychology and/or neuroscience.