

Mind and the Institutions of Meaning

7,5 credits

Teacher: Sharon Rider

Course code: —

Established: —

Established by: The Department of Philosophy

Main field(s) of study and in-depth level: Theoretical Philosophy – advanced, postgraduate.

Grading system: Fail (U), Pass (G), Pass with distinction (VG)

Language: The course will be given in English.

Aim

The aim of the course is to introduce students at the advanced and doctoral level to the philosophical position called *anthropological holism*.

Upon completion of the course, the student should be able to

- describe the main theories of mind and meaning covered in the literature;
- analyze different approaches to solving the problem of how to identify thoughts and beliefs, and the problems associated with each;
- apply these ideas to other problems in other areas of philosophy, such as ethics and epistemology;
- compare, contrast and evaluate the strengths and weakness of the different approaches discussed.

Course description

Holism is the idea that an object or phenomenon is more than the sum of its parts. But analysis, which is crucial to human comprehension, involves the mind breaking down an object of thought into its components, dismantling the whole in order to grasp it bit by bit and relationally. In this course, we will study meaning, not fundamentally as a property of mental representations, but as something arising in social existence, and tied to practices involved in ordinary speech and action. On this account, to understand what an individual “believes” or “wants” (to apply psychological words to a person), we must take into account the full historical and institutional context in which what he says or does is embedded. We will address issues such as to what extent it is possible that two people share the same thought if they do not share the same conceptual framework. In order to answer such questions, we will consider a logic of relations that can explain the human ability to analyze structures based on their parts, by looking at ideas and studies from anthropology, linguistics, and social theory, as well as philosophy.

Teaching

Instruction will take the form of lectures and seminars.

Examination

The examination consists of a final paper of 3000-5000 words on a theme related to the course.

Course literature

The course literature consists of Vincent Descombes' *The Institutions of Meaning* (Harvard UP, 2014) and a compendium of texts that will be made available at the start of the course.

Course schedule

17 April, 11-14, room 4-0019
23 April, 11-14, room 4-0019
25 April, 12-15, room 4-0019
29 April, 11-14, room 4-0019
6 Maj, 11-14, room 4-0019
9 Maj, 13-16, room 4-0019