"What is Information" Seminar:
with a focus on Humans
INLS 490(40), Spring 2009
MW 9:30-10:45
Robert Losee

WARNING: This schedule is currently a very rough draft. The readings and dates will certainly change some. This is on the web in order to give students an idea as to the content, level, and direction of the course. The schedule will be finalized at least a week before the first class session.

Note that I am planning on teaching a "what is information" seminar in the fall with a focus on physical processes and computation.

Warning: This course will not be an easy one (most seminars require active and continuous participation by students) but past students for the "what is information" seminars have found them useful and enjoyable. No auditors.

Readings should be completed before the class on the date indicated.

Recommended book purchases (or obtain from Library)

Morris, Michael. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language. Cambridge, 2007. Davis: P107.M67 2007. $30.99

Huemer, Michael, editor. Epistemology: Contemporary Readings. Routledge, 2002. SILS: BD161.E67 2002. $34.95. Read the book's Introduction, which links from the basics of epistemology to the readings in the book, as well as the brief introduction to any chapter in which there are required readings.

Introduction

Introduction
Losee, Discipline Independent Definition of Information (Read BEFORE the first class)

For each of the following topical area and readings groups, 4 students will be selected to print 14 copies (with the student's name on the top) of one or more descriptions of generic processes consistent with processes in the readings.

Each process should include (1) the input to the process, (2) very briefly what takes place in the process (a few words), and (3) the information in the output of the process. It might be easiest to have a column of text, with one row labeled "Input:", one labeled "Process:", and the third row labeled "Informative Output:". Copies will be distributed to each student and the instructor at the beginning of the class that will discuss the topic.

Reference

Morris, Chapters 1 & 2

Definite Descriptions and Proper Names

Morris, Chapters 3 & 4

Natural Kind Terms and Modalities

Morris, Chapter 5 & 6

Propositional Attitudes

Morris, Chapters 7 & 8

Truth

Morris, Chapter 9
Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy article on Truth

Speech Acts & Pragmatics

Morris, Chapters 12 & 13

Perception

Skim Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry for "The Problem of Perception"
In Huemer, Chapter 1, read sections authored by LATER

Reason and the A Priori

In Huemer, Chapter 3, read sections authored by LATER

Reasoning Systems

In Huemer, Chapter 5, read sections authored by LATER

Induction and Quantitative Reasoning

In Huemer, Chapter 6, read sections authored by LATER

Justified True Belief as Knowledge

In Huemer, Chapter 8, read sections authored by
Gettier
Clark
Goldman
Lehrer and Paxson

Skepticism, or JTB doesn't equal Knowledge

In Huemer, Chapter 9, read sections authored by
Putnam
Dretske

Information Economics

Read Handout provided by Instructor

Design a Human or a Robot

Given the above readings, and the informative processes we have discussed, what would be the characteristics of a rational being that could retain knowledge? Conversely, given this being, what kind of "thought" could occur?

Student presentations

Each students will present one article (and be the commentator on a second article) from a list of articles on "what is information" from within the ILS literature. The presenter will take 8 to 12 minutes to present the ideas in the article (no slides) and the commentator will use a few minutes to provide some reactions, additional ideas, etc. The commentator is not to attack; they are to provide constructive support and to help fill in gaps.