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Office hours: Mondays, 2–5pm

PHILOSOPHY OF MIND
PHIL 306, FALL 2021
12:30–1:20pm M/W/F, Ming Hsieh Hall G20

This course will survey important historical and contemporary strands in the philosophy of cognition and consciousness. We'll begin by asking whether you're made out of meat, and end by asking whether you're made out of stories. Along the way, via close engagement with philosophical and scientific texts, we'll discuss the relationship between minds and brains, the philosophical foundations of cognitive science, the evolutionary origins of higher cognition, the possibility that your iPhone is literally part of your mind, the possibility that your mom is literally part of your mind, and the mysteries of consciousness.

Brief grading breakdown

Argument reconstruction: 10% (due 9/10)
Take-home midterm exam: 30% (due 10/3)
Original argument sketch: 10% (due 10/22)
Thesis paper outline: 15% (due 11/12)
Thesis paper: 25% (due 12/15)
Participation: 10% (logs due 9/24 and 12/8)

Grade scale

A: 90–100%
B: 80–89%
C: 70–79%
D: 60–69%
F: 0–59%

Brief schedule

Part I: The Mind/Body Problem and other Mysteries

Week 1: Minds made out of meat

Week 2: Dreams and doubts

Part II: The Rise of Cognitive Science

Week 3: Dualism and materialism

Week 4: The mind/brain identity theory

reconstruction due 9/10

Week 5: Behaviorism and cognitivism

Week 6: Functionalism

participation log due 9/24

Week 7: Perception

Week 8: Central cognition

midterm due 10/3

Part III: The Origins and Boundaries of Cognition

Week 9: Evolutionary origins

Week 10: Porous boundaries

sketch due 10/22

Week 11: Argument workshop

Part IV: Consciousness (and the Self)

Week 12: What is it like to be a bat?

Week 13: How well do you know your own mind?

outline due 11/12

Week 14: Outline consultations

Week 15: Is consciousness itself an illusion?

Week 16: Selves made out of stories

participation log due 12/8

thesis paper due 12/15

Full grading breakdown

Writing workshops

All of the assignments described below will prepare you for writing a paper defending an original thesis in the philosophy of mind. Detailed expectations for the argument reconstruction, exam, original argument sketch, thesis paper outline, and thesis paper will be discussed during our regular in-class writing workshops on 9/8, 10/11, 10/29, and 11/29.

Argument reconstruction (10%)

A reconstruction, in premise-conclusion form, of a philosopher's argument (from a written passage that I will provide) will be due on 9/10 by 11:59pm.

Take-home midterm exam (30%)

The midterm exam, due on 10/3 by 11:59pm, will have two parts. The first part (worth 15 points) will be a 500–750-word essay response to a prompt that I will provide. The second part will comprise three pro-and-con lists (worth 5 points each) which give reasons for and against believing an interesting claim in the philosophy of mind.

Original argument sketch (10%)

A sketch, in premise-conclusion form, of an original argument in the philosophy of mind, which may or may not build off of one of your pro-and-con lists from the midterm, will be due on 10/22 by 11:59pm. The class sessions on 10/25, 10/27, and 10/29 will then be spent on a workshop about how to revise your sketches and turn them into outlines.

Thesis paper outline (15%)

An outline of your thesis paper will be due on 11/12 by 11:59pm. Your outline must center on an original argument sketch, which may or may not be the one already graded. The class sessions on 11/15, 11/17, 11/19, and 11/29 will then be spent on individual consultations about how to revise your outlines and turn them into papers.

Thesis paper (25%)

Your 1,000–3,000-word paper will be due on 12/15 by 11:59pm. It will be graded both on its intrinsic quality and on how much of an improvement it is over the thesis paper outline.

Participation (10%)

This course will center on class discussion about a complicated subject matter, and thus will require each student's effective participation. Effective participation involves thoughtfully and respectfully engaging in live class discussions (and/or posting to our Discord server) in a manner that demonstrates you have done the assigned reading. Note that asking clarificatory questions about the reading or about something I've said is often an extremely effective method of engagement! Participation will be self-graded via two logs detailing your participation (in class and on Discord). Participation logs will be due on 9/24 and 12/8.

Other information, policies, expectations, and advice

Course materials

This course has two online hubs:

- Our eCampus page, where you will find pdfs of all required readings, places to submit your assignments, and your grades.
- Our Discord server, where you will find announcements and interact with me and your classmates outside of the classroom.

Please email me ASAP if you have any trouble accessing any course materials.

Contacting me

You should reach out early and often about any issues you're having with the course. Sending me a message on Discord is the easiest way to ask me a quick question and get a quick answer. For more involved or sensitive questions, please use email. I'll respond to all questions posed on Discord or via email within one work day.

Office hours

I'll be available on Mondays from 2–5pm, via Discord (text only) and Zoom (be patient in the waiting room), and in my physical office (Arnold 112). That time is specifically set aside to talk to students; I highly recommend taking advantage by dropping in and asking any and all questions you have about the course.

Attendance

Attendance is not required, but failing to attend class will hurt your participation grade. Much more importantly, attending and engaging in class is essential to cultivating critical thinking skills and a philosophical frame of mind (and thus getting your time and money's worth for taking this course).

Late policy

All assignments must be uploaded to eCampus by 11:59pm on the due date. Late assignments will not be accepted unless an extension of the deadline has been granted. If you need to request an extension, please email me as soon as you can. In most cases, I will happily grant a 48-hour extension, no questions asked.

Accommodations

If you have good reason to be exempt from (or subject to a modified version of) any policy on this syllabus, please let me know. We'll work something out. If you have a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this course, please also make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (<https://accessibilityservices.wvu.edu/>).

Plagiarism

Don't do it. Exercise academic integrity, as defined by the WVU Policy on Student Academic Integrity. Plagiarism (or abetting another student plagiarizing) will result in an automatic zero on the plagiarized assignment, as well as a formal complaint. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please ask.

Statement of non-discrimination

The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. Our discussions will be predicated on these commitments.

Expected learning outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be better able to:

- 1) identify, describe, and evaluate the aims, strategies, assumptions, and arguments of philosophical and scientific texts;
- 2) understand the fundamental contours of key debates in the philosophy of cognition and consciousness;
- 3) apply a philosophical lens to conceptual questions in cognitive science;
- 4) develop and defend original philosophical theses in clear and concise argumentative prose.

Recommended books

We'll be reading a big chunk of each of the following books. Since eCampus only has the excerpts I've assigned, you might want to get your own copy of one or both of them, especially if you end up writing your thesis paper on a related topic.

Jerry Fodor, *The Modularity of Mind* (MIT Press 1983)

Eric Schwitzgebel, *Perplexities of Consciousness* (MIT Press 2011)

In addition, especially (but not only) if you're new to philosophical writing, I highly recommend getting (and frequently consulting) a copy of Weston's rulebook.

Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments* 5th Edition (Hackett 2017)

Some tips

Set aside at least six hours a week, outside of class, to engage in the sustained, attentive, and reflective thinking which philosophical reading demands. Come to each class having read—and reread as many times as are necessary for comprehension—the assigned text(s). Ask questions, both in person and on Discord. Contribute to class discussion when you have something to say. Listen to your peers carefully and respectfully whether or not you have something to say. Come chat with me in office hours whenever you want to review (or delve deeper into) something we have read or discussed in class. Seriously, office hours are there for you to use. Use them!

Full reading schedule

Part I: The Mind/Body Problem and other Mysteries

8/18: You're made out of meat

8/20: Three marks of the mental

Reading: Handout on Consciousness, Intentionality, and Agency
Heyes, "What is Cognition?"

8/23: I am doubting

Reading: Descartes, *Meditations* (I, II)

8/25: Doubts about dreaming

Reading: Schwitzgebel, "Recoloring the Dreamworld"

8/27: Doubts about ordinary perceptual experience

Reading: Schwitzgebel, "Do Things Look Flat?"
Morales, Bax, and Firestone, "Sustained Representation of Perspectival Shape"

Part II: The Rise of Cognitive Science

8/30: Dualism and materialism

Reading: Descartes, *Principles* (§§51–53, 60, 63)
Elisabeth of Bohemia, Correspondence with Descartes (selection)
Hobbes, *De Corpore* (selection)

9/1: Against both dualism and materialism

Reading: Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (Ch. I, Ch. II §7)

9/3: Diverse ways of thinking about thought

Reading: Wiredu, "The Akan Concept of Mind" (153–160, 166–168)

9/6: *no class*

9/8: Initial writing workshop

Reading: Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments* (Ch. I, Ch. VI)
Handout on How to Write Philosophy

9/10: The mind/brain identity theory

Reading: Place, "Is Consciousness a Brain Process?"

9/13: Behaviorism

Reading: Skinner, *Verbal Behavior* (10–12)

9/15: Cognitivism

Reading: Chomsky, "A Review of B.F. Skinner's *Verbal Behavior*" (§§I–V, XI)

9/17: The computer analogy

Reading: Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" (433–442, 454–460)
Marr, *Vision* (69–74)

9/20: Functionalism

Reading: Putnam, "The Nature of Mental States"

9/22: Cognitive architecture

Reading: Fodor, "Four Accounts of Mental Structure" (1–14, 21–22, 36–38)

9/24: Computationalism

Reading: Fodor, "A Functional Taxonomy of Cognitive Mechanisms"

9/27: The modularity of perception and language processing

Reading: Fodor, "Input Systems as Modules" (47–72, 86–87)

9/29: The perception-cognition divide

Reading: Firestone and Scholl, "Cognition Does Not Affect Perception" (1–18)
Fodor, "Input Systems as Modules" (98–101)

10/1: *no class*

10/4: Central cognition

Reading: Fodor, "Central Systems"
"Caveats and Conclusions" (119, 126–129)

10/6: Alternative views of perception and cognition

Reading: Hatfield, "Cognition"

10/8: *no class*

Part III: The Origins and Boundaries of Cognition

10/11: Writing workshop and the (purported) evolution of massive modularity

Reading: Cosmides and Tooby, "Evolutionary Psychology: A Primer" (1–13)

10/13: Against capital-E, capital-P Evolutionary Psychology

Reading: Gould and Lewontin, "The Spandrels of San Marco" (581–585)
Lloyd, "Evolutionary Psychology: The Burdens of Proof" (211–221, 223–230)

10/15: Minds evolve together

Reading: Sterelny, "The Informational Commonwealth"

10/18: The boundaries of the mind

Reading: Clark and Chalmers, "The Extended Mind"

10/20: Thinking through others

Reading: Gallagher, "The Socially Extended Mind"
Huebner, "Socially Embedded Cognition"

10/22: Boxology, aboutness, and evolution

Reading: Dennett, "Things about Things"

10/25: Cognition wrap-up and argument sketch workshop

10/27: Argument sketch workshop

10/29: Argument sketch workshop

Part IV: Consciousness (and the Self)

11/1: Dualism redux

Reading: Lycan, "Giving Dualism its Due"

11/3: What is it like to be a bat?

Reading: Nagel, "What is it like to be a Bat?"

11/5: What is it like to be a human?

Reading: Schwitzgebel, "Human Echolocation"

11/8: Is consciousness sparse or abundant?

Reading: Schwitzgebel, "Do you have Constant Tactile Experience of Feet in Shoes?"

11/10: How skeptical should we be?

Reading: Spener, "Moderate Skepticism about Introspection"
Schwitzgebel, "Reply to Spener"

11/12: *no class*

11/15: Outline consultations

11/17: Outline consultations

11/19: Outline consultations

11/22-11/26: *Thanksgiving Break*

11/29: Straggler outline consultations and final writing workshop

12/1: Why do we think there's a hard problem of consciousness?

Reading: Chalmers, "The Metaproblem of Consciousness" (6–15, 34–35)

12/3: Is consciousness an illusion?

Reading: Chalmers, "The Metaproblem of Consciousness" (40–44, 52–56)

12/6: You're made out of stories

Reading: Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity"

12/8: About whom do we tell stories about selves?

Reading: Camp, "Wordsworth's Prelude ... and Narrative Constructions of the Self"