

Dr. Devin Sanchez Curry
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Office: Arnold Hall 112
Hours: M/T 10:30–12:00

PHILOSOPHY OF MIND
PHIL 306, FALL 2019
Ming Hsieh Hall 122, M/W/F 9:30–10:20

The first unit of this lecture and discussion course on the philosophical study of cognition and consciousness will address metaphysical questions: *what's the relation between minds and brains? Can machines think, feel, or act? How are cognitive systems organized?* The second unit will address epistemological questions: *how do you know that other people are conscious? How well do we know our own minds, anyway? And how can psychologists and neuroscientists study minds scientifically?* The course will culminate with each student independently researching a mental state or process.

Required books

Jerry Fodor, *The Modularity of Mind* (MIT Press 1983)
Eric Schwitzgebel, *Perplexities of Consciousness* (MIT Press 2011)

Brief grading breakdown

Participation: 10%
Essays: 20% (due 9/9 and 11/4)
Take-home exam: 30% (due 10/4)
Article synopsis: 10% (due 11/22)
Thesis paper: 30% (due 12/20)

Grade scale

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

Brief schedule

Week 1: Can thermometers feel? Can computers think? Can robots act for reasons?

Metaphysics of Cognition and Consciousness

Week 2: The mind-body problem

Week 3: Materialisms

Week 4: Functionalism

Week 5: Cognitive architecture

Week 6: Modularity

Week 7: Rationality and intentionality

Week 8: Mind and world

Epistemology of Consciousness and Cognition

Week 9: The problem of other minds

Week 10: Perceptual perplexities

Week 11: Introspection

Week 12: The meta-problem of consciousness

Week 13: Methodological issues in cognitive neuroscience

Cartography of Mind

Week 14: Writing workshop

Week 15: Belief, desire, emotions, pain, concepts, and perception

Week 16: Memory, attention, dreams, and the self

Detailed grading breakdown

Essays (20%)

Two 500–750 word essays (worth 10% each) will be due on 9/9 and 11/4, respectively. These essays will be graded on how well they demonstrate your understanding of arguments and objections from class readings, lectures, and discussions.

Take-home exam (30%)

A take-home exam on the metaphysics of mind will be due on 10/4. The exam will consist of three essay prompts; you must write 500–750 word essays in response to two prompts of your choice. The exam will be graded on how accurately, thoroughly, and insightfully you respond to each part of the prompts you select.

Article synopsis (10%)

A 500–750 word synopsis of a peer-reviewed article on the topic of your thesis paper will be due on 11/22. You must sign up for a topic on eCampus before Fall Break. Then, by 11/15, you must read all three relevant articles on eCampus, and sign up for one to synopsize. Your synopsis will be graded accuracy and clarity. It will be required reading for the whole class on 12/2, 12/4, 12/6, 12/9, or 12/11.

Thesis paper (30%)

A 1,000–2,000 word thesis paper, which provides an argument for a thesis concerning your chosen topic, will be due on 12/12. Expectations for this paper will be discussed in detail during the in-class writing workshop on 11/18, 11/20, and 11/22.

Participation (10%)

You will earn up to 2.5% per session for helping your classmates brainstorm their thesis papers on 12/2, 12/4, 12/6, 12/9, and 12/11. You will *not* be graded for brainstorming your own paper topic. Daily participation will also be the determining factor if you end up on the borderline between two grades (e.g., excellent participation will bump a 79% to a B).

Thesis paper topics

Belief	Desire	Emotions	Pain	Concepts
Perception	Memory	Attention	Dreams	The self

Due dates, extensions, and late assignments

All assignments must be uploaded to eCampus by the beginning of class on the due date. If you need an extension for any assignment, please ask in writing in advance of the deadline (a brief email is fine). I will then grant you a 48-hour extension of the deadline, no questions asked. If you need more than two extra days, you must meet with me during office hours to devise a concrete plan for finishing the assignment. In the absence of an extension, assignments will be penalized one point (1% of your total grade) for each day they are late.

Detailed schedule

8/21: Introductions

8/23: Can thermometers feel? Can computers think? Can robots do things for reasons?

Reading: Handout on consciousness, intentionality, and agency

Metaphysics of Cognition and Consciousness

8/26: Hylomorphism

Reading: Aristotle, *De Anima* (selection)

8/28: Dualism

Reading: Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy* (§§1–12, 51–53, 60, 63)

8/30: Materialism

Reading: Elisabeth of Bohemia, Correspondence with Descartes (selection)
Hobbes, *De Corpore* (selection)

9/2: No class (Labor Day)

9/4: Behaviorism and dispositionalism

Reading: Skinner, *Verbal Behavior* (selection)

Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (Ch. I, Ch. II §8, Ch. X §2)

9/6: The mind/brain identity theory

Reading: Place, “Is Consciousness a Brain Process?”

9/9: Cognitivism (**first essay due**)

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

9/11: The computer analogy

Reading: Turing, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence” (433–442)

9/13: Functionalism

Reading: Putnam, “The Nature of Mental States”

9/16: Cognitive architecture

Reading: Fodor, “Four Accounts of Mental Structure”

9/18: Computationalism

Reading: Fodor, “A Functional Taxonomy of Cognitive Mechanisms”

9/20: Alternative views of cognition

Reading: Hatfield, “Cognition”

9/23: Modularity

Reading: Fodor, “Input Systems as Modules” (47 – 86)

9/25: The perception/cognition divide

Reading: Fodor, “Input Systems as Modules” (86–101)

9/27: The new top-down challenge

Reading: Firestone and Scholl, “Cognition Does Not Affect Perception” (1–18)

9/30: Central cognition

Reading: Fodor, "Central Systems" and "Caveats and Conclusions"

10/2: The intentional stance

Reading: Dennett, "True Believers"

10/4: Intentional realism(s) (**take-home exam due**)

Reading: Dennett, "Real Patterns"

10/7: Where does the mind stop and world begin?

Reading: Clark and Chalmers, "The Extended Mind"

10/9: Is dualism dead?

Reading: Lycan, "Giving Dualism its Due"

10/11: *No class (Fall Break)*

Epistemology of Consciousness and Cognition

10/14: The problem of other minds

Reading: Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (selection)

10/16: Phenomenal consciousness

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

10/18: The hard(?) problem

Reading: Churchland, "The Hornswoggle Problem"

10/21: Dreaming

Reading: Schwitzgebel, "Recoloring the Dreamworld"

10/23: Perceptual experience

Reading: Schwitzgebel, "Do Things Look Flat?"

10/25: Do humans know what it is like to be a bat?

Reading: Schwitzgebel, "Human Echolocation"

10/28: Mental imagery

Reading: Schwitzgebel, "Galton's Other Folly"

10/30: The texture of consciousness

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

11/1: Introspection

Reading: Schwitzgebel, "The Unreliability of Naïve Introspection"

11/4: Why do we think there is a problem of consciousness? (**second essay due**)

Reading: Chalmers, "The Meta-Problem of Consciousness" (6–35)

11/6: Theories of consciousness and reports thereof

Reading: Chalmers, "The Meta-Problem of Consciousness" (35–56)

11/8: Is consciousness an illusion?

Reading: Dennett, "Welcome to Strong Illusionism"

11/11: Brain images

Reading: Roskies, "Are Neuroimages like Photographs of the Brain?"

11/13: Is cognitive neuroscience a waste of time?

Reading: Fodor, "Why, Why, Does Everyone go on so about the Brain?"

11/15: In defense of cognitive neuroscience

Reading: Farah, "Brain Images, Babies, and Bathwater"

Cartography of Mind

11/18: Writing workshop

11/20: Writing workshop

11/22: Writing workshop (article synopsis due)

12/2: Belief and desire

Reading: Student article synopses

12/4: Emotions and pain

Reading: Student article synopses

12/6: Concepts and perception

Reading: Student article synopses

12/9: Memory and attention

Reading: Student article synopses

12/11: Dreams and the self

Reading: Student article synopses

12/20: thesis paper due

Other expectations and policies

Readings

Readings are to be completed before the relevant class session. Please also bring the (physical or digital) texts to class. The required books are available at the WVU Bookstore. All other readings will be accessible on eCampus. The required reading for this course will often be lengthy and/or difficult. I strongly recommend setting aside at least six hours a week to engage in the sustained, attentive, and reflective thinking which philosophical reading demands.

Some tips

Come to each class having read—and reread as many times as are necessary for comprehension—the assigned texts. Ask questions. 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.

Attendance

Attendance will not directly affect your course grade (though participation will, as detailed above). However, regular attendance is crucial to your success in the course: we will be reading difficult and nuanced philosophical and scientific texts which will often only make sense in light of the context provided by class lectures and discussions. Thus, if you miss class more than four times, you must come to office hours to discuss your understanding of, and standing in, the course. Failure to do so in a timely manner will result in an automatic F for the entire course.

Expected learning outcomes

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

- 1) reason logically and creatively;
- 2) identify, describe, and evaluate the aims, strategies, assumptions, and arguments of philosophical and scientific texts;
- 3) discuss and debate vexed issues thoughtfully, charitably, and respectfully;
- 4) write expository and argumentative prose clearly and concisely;
- 5) understand the fundamental contours of the mind-body problem, the problems of intentionality and agency, the problem of other minds, and the hard problem of consciousness;
- 6) understand several important philosophical responses to these problems;
- 7) explain how philosophy and the sciences of the mind relate;
- 8) apply philosophical skills to conceptual questions in the cognitive sciences;
- 9) conduct independent research in philosophy;
- 10) develop and defend original philosophical theses.

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.

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 let me know and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (<https://accessibilityservices.wvu.edu/>).

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. All of our classroom discussions will be predicated on these commitments.