

Philosophy 193: Other (kinds of) minds

Maguire 103, T and TH 11:40-12:55

Professor: Bryce Huebner

lbh24@georgetown.edu

Office hours: Tuesdays 1-3 and by
appointment
234 New North

Philosophers have often asked what it means to have a mind, and this turns out to be a very difficult question. We often use psychological terms like 'belief', 'desire', and 'intention' to explain the behavior of multinational corporations and governments, people and household pets, laptop computers and automobiles; but, some of these claims are surely intended in a metaphorical or figurative tone of voice. In this course, we will examine various philosophical and psychological attempts to explain what it means to have a mind. We will ask how we know what other people are thinking when we seem to have only indirect access to their beliefs and desires; and, we will try to decide what it means to say that another entity has a mind that is fundamentally like our own. Over the course of the semester we will also ask whether it is possible to understand the minds of persons whose minds are rather different from our own; and we will conclude by asking how we might study the minds of apes, monkeys, cats, rats, snakes, spiders, cockroaches, and intelligent machines.

Required Texts

Daniel C. Dennett, *Kinds of minds* (New York: Basic Books, 1996);

Rene Descartes, *Meditations on first philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1641/1993);

Philip K. Dick, *Do androids dream of electric sheep* (New York: Del Rey Books, 1968);

Temple Grandin, *Thinking in pictures* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996);

Additional PDF documents (marked below with an asterisks) will be distributed via the course blog.

Course goals

In this course, we will attempt to develop the tools and techniques that will allow you to learn how to do philosophy well. We will focus on strategies for answering difficult philosophical questions as well as strategies for responding to the arguments that are offered by others. Over the course of the semester, your abilities to understand and to critically analyze difficult arguments will improve; and, you should begin to develop and defend your own positions on these difficult philosophical issues. Along the way, I hope to provide you with some resources that will allow you to address theoretical questions that arise across academic disciplines.

Assignments

Your grade will consist of three short papers (3-5pp; 25% each) as well as class participation (25%).

Short papers: In an attempt to alleviate conflicts with other papers and exams that you that may have to write, I have decided to offer you a choice of which papers to write in this course. As we approach the end of a section in the course, I will distribute paper prompts covering the material that we will have covered in that section. Over the course

of this semester you must choose to write 2 of these short papers (Due: **4 February; 18 February; 25 March; or, 8 April**). Each student must also write a final paper (Due: **12 May**).

Course Blog (<https://digitalcommons.georgetown.edu/blogs/phil-193-spring2011/>): Each student will be assigned a date on which they must post a new discussion topic on the course blog. These discussion topics must be posted a minimum of 18 hours prior to the class meeting, and they must offer a brief critical remark on the reading for the upcoming class (approx. 300 words). If there are any readings for which you would prefer not to post a new discussion, please notify me that this is the case by 17 January 2011; assignments will then be sent out on 18 January 2011.

Additionally, each student must leave a comment on the blog before each class meeting. You will not be graded on the content of your comments. However, if you fail to contribute to the blog in a way that demonstrates a genuine engagement with the philosophical issues, you will be penalized on the participation component of your grade. *Please note:* I will not contribute to the blog; it is intended as a space where you can discuss, and struggle with the issues together. I will, however, read each of the posts prior to class and use them in structuring our classroom discussion of the material.

Grading

Anonymous Grading: Your papers will be submitted anonymously, with no identifying information other than your GUID#. If you include additional identifying information, your paper will not be graded. There is a wealth of psychological data suggesting that subtle, often implicit prejudices can influence the evaluation of a paper merely on the basis of a person's name. My hope, in adopting an anonymous grading strategy, is to guarantee as far as possible that grading is carried out in a way that is fair and reasonable. Given that your name never appears on your exams, this means that every exam will be graded on the basis of the words that are on the page, focusing on the clarity and accuracy of the presentation and the strength of the evidence that you present for the claims that you make.

Grading Criteria: In general, a paper that is 1) stylistically clear, 2) adequately articulates the claims that are being defended, and 3) provides adequate evidence and arguments in support of these claims—thereby presenting a clear and compelling argument—will receive a 'B' grade (a 'B-' will be weaker in one of these areas—but still satisfactory—and a 'B+' will excel in one of these areas). A 'C' grade will be awarded where a paper is weak in one or two of these categories; a 'D' grade will be awarded where a paper is weak in all 3 categories or omits one altogether (e.g., by lacking a thesis or lacking arguments for the truth of that thesis). An 'A' grade will be awarded only where a paper excels in each category, exhibiting a clear capacity for doing philosophy.

Appealing a grade: You are welcome to appeal any grade that you do not feel accurately represents the work that you have done. However, all appeals for re-evaluation must be made in writing, and must provide a compelling argument for raising the grade. I will do my best to return exams promptly; out of fairness, you will do your best to make any appeals for re-evaluation in a timely manner (In any case, all such appeals must be made *no more than two weeks* after your paper is returned). Note that the agreement to re-evaluate can result in three distinct outcomes: 1) raising the grade; 2) lowering the grade; or, 3) making no change to the grade. That is, a re-evaluation is

no guarantee of a better grade and may even result in a lower grade if there are not compelling reasons for raising your grade.

Late paper and make-up policy: The deadlines for turning in your papers are firm. I will give extensions only where I am presented with evidence of illness or a family emergency prior to the due date. Papers will automatically be penalized 1/3 of a grade (A- to a B+, B+ to a B, etc.) for each day that they are late.

Writing and writing assistance

Use of external resources: To succeed in this course, you will need to learn how to read carefully and reason carefully, and you need to learn how to recover arguments from difficult texts. To do well in this course, you will not have to read anything beyond what is assigned for the course. However, the best way to develop many of these skills will often be through collaboration and discussion with others. Beyond trying to clarify your thoughts by thinking out-loud in class, and beyond the discussions that you will be having on the class blog, you may also want to get together in small groups to think through the issues that we have been discussing outside of class; alternatively, you might want to *tweet* about your philosophical thoughts, or argue about the texts that you have been reading on Facebook. All of this is perfectly acceptable and likely to be helpful in understanding the difficult philosophical issues that we will be discussing. People have very different styles of thinking and learning; and you should use whatever resources suit you best in order to develop the skills that you need for succeeding in this class.

Academic honesty: Keeping the above considerations in mind, when it comes time for you to write your papers, you must use the skills that you have developed by thinking through the relevant issues on your own. You have all signed the Georgetown University Honor pledge and have agreed to be honest in your academic endeavors and to hold yourself to the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life. I expect you to be familiar with both the letter and the spirit of the pledge, and I will enforce the Honor Code by reporting any and all suspected cases of academic dishonesty. The Honor Code applies to all of the relevant aspects of this course and it is the responsibility of each student in this class to inform herself or himself of the relevant principles and to abide by them throughout the semester. Of course, the key to avoiding any dire consequences is to think for yourself, and do your own work on your papers. If you have any questions about what the Honor Pledge requires, please do not hesitate to ask me.

The writing center: The writing center provides one-on-one assistance at various stages of the writing process. All writers, even the most accomplished, can benefit from their assistance on issues as diverse as topic development, organization, and general strategies for revising. To make an appointment, see <http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu>.

Accommodations for students with differing abilities: If you are on record with the university as requiring special accommodations, please stop by my office and let me know in confidence within the first two weeks of the semester. If you find, during the course of the semester, that special accommodations are required, please bring me the relevant documentation from the university as soon as you acquire it.

Cell Phones and Computers:

Be sure to turn off the ringers on your cell phones when you come to class; if you forget to do so, and your phone rings, turn it off immediately. You may use your computer for note taking and other purposes consistent with the course (e.g., looking up quotes from the reading); however, I would appreciate it if you would have the maturity to refrain from using your computer for non-academic purposes (e.g., playing games or checking your email) while in the class. Computer use can distract others and create an environment in which it is difficult to learn; so, please be respectful.

Mind your manners:

Philosophy is best done collectively and collaboratively; however, some of the questions that we will be discussing in this course may generate contentious claims, spirited discussions, vehement disagreements, and trenchant criticisms. This is at least part of what doing philosophy is all about. In discussing, disagreeing, criticizing, and arguing with one another, we must make an effort to remain courteous and respectful. I promise to do my best to raise philosophical issues and to start philosophical discussions in ways that are as sensitive as possible to the variety of viewpoints and opinions that we are sure to find among the members of this class. But, I will only be able to do this if each of you helps create an atmosphere where we can develop ideas in a friendly and welcoming environment where we all learn from one another. Perhaps more importantly, if you want to disagree with someone, or if you want to offer a criticism of their viewpoint, be sure to offer reasons for the approach that you are suggesting. If we reason through things together, we are sure to have a great semester!

Tentative course schedule:

1/13	Introduction
Philosophical background	
1/18 1/20	*Heinlein, "They"; and, Bostrom, "Are you living in a simulation?" Descartes, <i>Meditations on first philosophy</i> , 1
1/25 1/27	Descartes, <i>Meditations on first philosophy</i> , 2 Descartes, <i>Meditations on first philosophy</i> , 3
2/1 2/3	Descartes, <i>Meditations on first philosophy</i> , 6 Descartes, <i>Meditations on first philosophy</i> , 6
2/7 2/8	Paper 1 is due *Russell, "Analogy"
Another problem of other minds	
2/10 2/15	*Gopnik and Wellman, "The child's theory of mind" *Gopnik and Wellman, "The child's theory of mind"
2/17 2/22	*Gallese & Goldman "Mirror neurons and simulation" *Saxe "Against simulation" plus Gordon and Mitchell
2/24	*Baron-Cohen, "Autism: The E-S theory".
2/28	Paper 2 is due
Understanding other kinds of human minds	
3/1 3/3	Grandin, <i>Thinking in pictures</i> Grandin, <i>Thinking in pictures</i>
3/15 3/17	*Radden, "Identity: Personal Identity...and Mental Disorder" *Saks, selections; and "A Scholar's Memoir of Schizophrenia"
3/22 3/24	*Dennett & Humphreys, "Speaking for ourselves" *Rosenhan, "On being sane in insane places"
3/28	Paper 3 is due
The possibility of artificial minds	
3/29 3/31	Dick, Do androids dream of electric sheep? Film Discussion: Ghost in the shell
4/5 4/7	*Turing, "Computing machinery and Intelligence" *Searle, "Minds, Brains, and programs"
4/11	Paper 4 is due
How to study the minds of animals (including human animals)	
4/12	Dennett, <i>Kinds of minds</i> , Chapter 1
4/14	Dennett, <i>Kinds of minds</i> , Chapter 2
4/19	Dennett, <i>Kinds of minds</i> , Chapter 3 and 4
4/26	Dennett, <i>Kinds of minds</i> , Chapter 5
4/28	Dennett, <i>Kinds of minds</i> , Chapter 6
5/12	Final paper Due