

Philosophy 491: Philosophy of mind and cognitive science

Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:30-10:45
White-Gravenor 211

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:00-3:30, and by appointment

One of the reasons cognitive science is such a land of plenty for philosophers is that so many of its questions—not just the grand bird's-eye view questions but quite proximal, in-the-lab-now questions—are still ill thought out, prematurely precipitated into forms that deserve critical reevaluation. If philosophy is, as my bumper sticker slogan has it, what you're doing until you figure out just what questions to ask, then there is a lot of philosophy to be done by cognitive scientists these days (Dennett, TopiCS, 2009)

Our primary aim in this course is to examine a set of issues in the philosophy of mind, and to try to figure out whether research in the cognitive sciences can help us to solve these issues. Some questions we address will be grand bird's-eye view questions; others will be the sorts of questions that are more straightforwardly amenable to scientific investigation. Of course, our overview will not be, and cannot be complete. But I hope the things we read together will make it clear why philosophy must play a role in cognitive scientific research.

Requirements: This is a small class, so you will be expected to make consistent contributions to the discussion in class (**30% of your grade**). To enhance the quality of these discussions, you must submit a brief three-sentence response to one of the readings by midnight, on the night prior to each class (**10% of your grade**); these sentences should be responses to the following three questions:

- 1) What interesting thing does the author say that you agree with?
- 2) What interesting thing does the author say that you disagree with?
- 3) If you could ask the author one question to improve your understanding of her or his position, what would it be?

Learning to do philosophy is hard, and I hope that *working together* through the responses to these questions together will help us to get a handle on the difficult issues raised by various readings.

You will also be required to submit two short papers over the course of the semester (max: 3000 words; abstract max: 150 words). The first will be due on **6 March (30% of your grade)**. The second will be due on **8 May (30% of your grade)**. You may petition to write a single longer paper (max: 8000 words; abstract max: 300 words); this option will require a paper proposal (due: **6 March, 10% of your grade**) and a final paper (Due: **8 May, 50% of your grade**)

Grading Criteria: *In general*, a 'B+' paper will 1) clearly articulate the claims being defended, 2) be well organized, 3) will rely on strong evidence and arguments, and 4) will be stylistically clear—thereby presenting a competent argument. A 'B' paper will be weaker in one of these areas—but still satisfactory—and an 'A-' paper will excel in one of these areas. A 'C' grade will be awarded to a paper that is weak in one or two of these categories; a 'D' grade will be awarded to a paper that is weak in 3 or 4 categories or omits one altogether (e.g., by lacking a thesis or lacking arguments for a thesis). An 'A' grade will only be awarded to a paper that *excels* in each category, thereby exhibiting a clear capacity for *doing philosophy*.

Paper deadlines: All paper deadlines are firm. Late 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.

Appealing a grade: You can appeal any grade that you feel does not accurately represent the work you have done. All appeals for re-evaluation must be made in writing, no more than two weeks after your paper is returned, and must provide a compelling argument for raising the grade. A re-evaluation is no

guarantee of a better grade, and it can even result in a lower grade if you do not offer a compelling case for raising your grade.

The honor code: The Georgetown University Honor pledge requires you 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 the letter and the spirit of this pledge; and, I will enforce the Honor Code by reporting any and all suspected cases of academic dishonesty.

Tentative reading schedule

9 Jan	Introduction to the class
14-16 Jan	Rene Descartes, Passions of the soul (part I), Letter to Cavendish Gilbert Ryle, "Descartes Myth"
21-23 Jan	Bill Lycan, "The mind-body problem" Alyssa Ney, "Physicalism as an attitude" [(optional) Barbara Montero, "Post-physicalism"]
28-30 Jan	Jackson, "What Mary didn't know" [(optional) Martine Nida-Rimelin, "Pseudonormal vision"] Thomas Nagel, "What is it like to be a bat?" Kathleen Akins, "A bat without qualities"
4 Feb	A.M. Turing, "Computing machinery and intelligence"
6 Feb	No class – Professor Huebner is at the SSPP
11-13 Feb	John Searle, "Is the brain's mind a computer program?" Louise Antony, "Feeling fine about the mind"
18-20 Feb	Dan Dennett, "True believers" Lynne Rudder Baker, "Instrumental Intentionality"
25-27 Feb	Heidi Maibom, "The mindreader and the scientist" Kristin Andrews, "It's in your nature: A pluralistic folk psychology" [(optional) Peter Godfrey-Smith, "Folk psychology as a model"]
4-6 March	Tamar Gendler, "Alief in action (and reaction)" Barbara Montero, "A dancer reflects: deliberation in action"
7-17 March	Spring Break
18-20 March	Al Mele, A Dialogue on Free will and Science
25-27 March	Shaun Gallagher, "The natural philosophy of agency" Holly Anderson, "Causation and the awareness of agency" Elisabeth Pacherie, "Can conscious agency be saved?"
1-3 April	Larry Shaprio, Embodied Cognition (Chapters 1-2) Patricia Churchland, V.S. Ramachandran, & Terrence Sejnowski, "A critique of pure vision"
8-10 April	Larry Shaprio, Embodied Cognition (Chapter 3) Linda Smith & Esther Thelen, "Development as a dynamic system" Margaret Wilson, "Six views of embodied cognition"
15 April	Larry Shapiro, Embodied cognition (Chapters 4) Brad Mahon & Alfonso Caramazza, "A critical look at the embodied cognition hypothesis"
16-21 April	Easter Break
22-24 April	Larry Shapiro, Embodied cognition (Chapters 5-7)