

Syllabus: Minds, Machines, and Persons Fall 2016

Instructor: Cameron Domenico Kirk-Giannini

Office: Philosophy Department Room 514, 106 Somerset Street, 5th Floor

Office Hours: Monday 2:30-3:30 pm (and by appointment)

Email: mmpfall16@gmail.com (all assignments should be submitted to this address)

Classroom: Hardenbergh Hall B-3

Class Hours: Monday and Wednesday 1:10-2:30 pm

Class Description

Can computers think? Are *we* computers? If so, are we *mere* computers? That is, is there anything to our mental lives over and above their computational character?

The goal of this course is to explore and critically assess a variety of answers to these questions. In the first half of the semester, we will consider the dominant theory of the mind in cognitive science: the computational theory of cognition. After examining the most important arguments for this theory, we will turn our attention to the thorny question of how the mental representations it posits get their contents. In the second half of the semester, we will consider two kinds of problems for the computational theory of cognition. First, we will discuss a number of arguments which purport to show that there is more to our mental lives than computation. Second, we will study two direct challenges to the computational theory: eliminativism and the extended/embodied cognition movement.

Learning Objectives

First, this course will give you a detailed understanding of some of the most important issues in the philosophy of cognitive science. Second, this course is designed to help you develop crucial philosophical abilities like reconstructing and evaluating arguments, articulating your ideas in conversation, and writing clearly and cogently. Half of our meetings will be devoted to discussion. While I will guide these discussions, it will be up to you to formalize and criticize the arguments we find in our readings and engage with other students who might disagree with you about whether they are sound.

Assignments and Grading

There will be three significant course requirements. First, you will be required to write a short (no more than 200 word!) response to the reading each week. These responses must *not* merely summarize the reading — they must either describe a weakness in the author's argument or articulate a sophisticated question about the reading. **You are free to skip up to three of these responses without penalty.** Second, there will be two 900-1200 word papers. Third, there will be a take-home exam consisting of a number of short

essay responses during the last week of classes. You will have 72 hours to complete your responses and send them to me.

Grades will be determined as follows:

- Class participation and reading responses: 20%
- Take-home final: 30%
- Paper 1: 25%
- Paper 2: 25%

Textbook

There will be no textbook for this course. All required readings will be available for download on the course website.

Semester Overview

Part I: The Computational Theory of Cognition

Week 1:

Reading: None

Wednesday, September 7th: Introduction

Assignment: Week 2 reading response due by 5:00 PM EST on Friday, September 9th

Week 2:

Reading: Jerry Fodor, *Psychosemantics*, Ch 1 (pages 1-17)

Monday, September 12th: Fodor Scrutinized (Discussion)

Wednesday, September 14th: Representation and Computation (Lecture)

Assignment: Week 3 reading response due by 5:00 PM EST on Friday, September 16th

Week 3:

Reading: Jerry Fodor, *Psychosemantics*, Ch 1 (pages 18-25), Appendix

Monday, September 19th: Fodor Scrutinized Again (Discussion)

Wednesday, September 21st: The Computational Theory of Cognition (Lecture)

Assignment: Week 4 reading response due by 5:00 PM EST on Friday, September 23rd

Week 4:

Reading: Stephen Stich, *From Folk Psychology to Cognitive Science*, Ch 8, Sections 2 and 3

Monday, September 26th: Stich Scrutinized (Discussion)

Wednesday, September 28th: Stich's Syntactic Theory (Lecture)

Assignment: Week 5 reading response due by 5:00 PM EST on Friday, September 30th

Week 5:

Reading: Frances Egan, "Computation and Content"

Monday, October 3rd: Egan Scrutinized (Discussion)

Wednesday, October 5th: Content or Discontent? (Lecture)

Assignment: Week 6 reading response due by 5:00 PM EST on Friday, October 7th

Part II: How Do Representations Get Their Contents?

Week 6:

Reading: Ruth Garrett Millikan, "Biosemantics"

Monday, October 10th: Millikan Scrutinized (Discussion)

Wednesday, October 12th: Teleological Theories of Mental Content (Lecture)

Assignment: Week 7 reading response due by 5:00 PM EST on Friday, October 14th

Week 7:

Reading: Jerry Fodor, "A Theory of Content, II: The Theory" (Selection)

Monday, October 17th: Fodor Scrutinized Once More (Discussion)

Wednesday, October 19th: Asymmetric Dependency Theories of Mental Content (Lecture)

Assignment: Week 8 reading response due by 5:00 PM EST on Friday, October 21st

Part III: Is Computation Enough?

Week 8:

Reading: John Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs," with replies by Block, Dennett, and Fodor

Monday, October 24th: Searle Scrutinized (Discussion)

Wednesday, October 26th: The Chinese Room (Lecture)

ASSIGNMENT: PAPER 1 DUE BY 5:00 PM EST ON TUESDAY, OCTOBER 25TH

Assignment: Week 9 reading response due by 5:00 PM EST on Friday, October 28th

Week 9:

Reading: Frank Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia"

Monday, October 31st: Jackson Scrutinized (Discussion)

Wednesday, November 2nd: The Knowledge Argument (Lecture)

Assignment: Week 10 reading response due by 5:00 PM EST on Friday, November 4th

Week 10:

Reading: Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?"

Monday, November 7th: Nagel Scrutinized (Discussion)

Wednesday, November 9th: Nagel, Jackson, and Searle in Dialogue (Lecture)

Assignment: Week 11 reading response due by 5:00 PM EST on Friday, November 11th

Part IV: Challenges to the Computational Theory of Cognition

Week 11:

Reading: Patricia Smith Churchland, "Language, Thought, and Information Processing"

Monday, November 14th: Churchland Scrutinized (Discussion)

Wednesday, November 16th: Eliminative Materialism and Connectionism (Lecture)

Assignment: Week 13 reading response due by 5:00 PM EST on Friday, November 18th

Week 12:

Reading: None

Monday, November 21st: Course Review (Discussion)

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 23RD: NO CLASS

Assignment: None

Week 13:

Reading: Andy Clark and David Chalmers, "The Extended Mind"

Monday, November 28th: Clark and Chalmers Scrutinized (Discussion)

Wednesday, November 30th: The Extended Mind (Lecture)

Assignment: Week 14 reading response due by 5:00 PM EST on Friday, December 2nd

Week 14:

Reading: Fred Adams and Ken Aizawa, "The Bounds of Cognition"

Monday, December 5th: Adams and Aizawa Scrutinized (Discussion)

Wednesday, December 7th: The Mind Confined? (Lecture)

Assignment: Week 15 reading response due by 5:00 PM EST on Friday, December 9th

ASSIGNMENT: PAPER 2 DUE BY 5:00 PM EST ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11TH

Week 15:

Reading: Lawrence Shapiro, *Embodied Cognition*, Ch 5

Monday, December 12th: Shapiro Scrutinized (Discussion)

Wednesday, December 14th: The Embodiment Challenge (Lecture)

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14TH: TAKE-HOME EXAM GOES LIVE AT 6:00 PM EST

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16TH: TAKE-HOME EXAM RESPONSES DUE AT 6:00 PM EST

Class Participation

Vocal participation in class is an extremely important part of learning to do philosophy. I will be keeping track of who participates in class and how many times they do so. This will enable me to both assign participation grades and ensure that those who have spoken less have priority when they wish to participate. There will be numerous opportunities to participate during both discussion sessions and lecture sessions. Feel free to ask a question at any time — remember, it's likely that someone else in the class has the same question and would benefit from you asking!

Lateness Policy

Reading responses may not be turned in late, but you are permitted to skip up to three without penalty. Other assignments may be turned in late, but will be subject to a one-letter-grade penalty per day late (a one-letter-grade drop is the difference between an A and a B and between a B+ and a C+).

If you would like an extension on an assignment, you must notify me at least 24 hours in advance of the deadline for that assignment. Extensions will be granted on a discretionary basis.

Laptop Use

Laptops may not be used in the classroom. Use of cell phones is also not permitted.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism of any form is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. For more information on what constitutes plagiarism, see: <http://wp.rutgers.edu/courses/plagiarism>. Please note that submitting the same material for credit on more than one assignment, whether in the same class or in different classes, is self-plagiarism and will be treated like any other form of plagiarism.

Collaboration

There are two kinds of collaborators. *Reviewers* offer comments on a pre-existing piece of writing. They are not responsible for the writing or major aspects of the argument of the pieces on which they comment. You are encouraged to seek reviewers for your pieces of writing (**NB: Except on the take-home final!**). Please acknowledge your reviewers by name in a footnote at the end of your essay.

Co-authors enter into the creative process with the author. They are responsible for significant parts of the writing and/or argument of the pieces which they co-author. You are not permitted to submit co-authored work for credit in this course.

Corrupt Files

It is your responsibility to ensure that you provide your written work to me in a format I can access. If you submit a corrupt file, I will do my best to notify you as soon as possible. It is then your responsibility to send me another copy of the file in a timely manner. This means it is very important that you open and read emails from me. If I request a second copy of a file and you do not reply in a timely manner, I will regard the assignment as not having been submitted.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Every effort will be made to accommodate students who present a valid Letter of Accommodations. For more information, see: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/my-accommodations/letter-of-accommodations>

Religious Observance

I am happy to accommodate special needs related to students' religious practices. However, I require that you notify me in writing within the first two weeks of class if you will need such accommodation at any point during the semester.

No Extra Credit

There will be no opportunities to earn extra credit in this course.

Confidentiality

Please note that I am required to report certain sensitive information you might relate to me to the University. If you would like to confidentially report sensitive information, you may do so through CAPS. For more information, see: <http://rhscaps.rutgers.edu/>.