

Philosophy 240
Spring, 2024
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Office hours – Tuesdays, 1-2pm (i.e., after class) or by appointment

MIND, SELF, AND CONSCIOUSNESS

This course explores three interrelated questions.

Firstly: What is it to have a mind? Does this depend on having an immaterial soul, or on exhibiting certain behavioral dispositions, or on possessing a biological brain? What about computers: are they capable of genuine intelligence or are there in-principal barriers to AGI?

Secondly: What is it for persons to persist across time? For instance, what makes it the case that I am the same person as the small child pictured in my oldest school photo? Is this something to do with our shared psychology, bodily continuity, or something else entirely?

Thirdly: What is the nature of conscious experience? When I look at a tomato, there is something it is like to experience its redness and its bulginess. Can this be reduced to the physical goings on inside my brain? And what other properties of the tomato do I see or experience? For instance, do I see its tomatoness, as opposed to merely judging that it's a tomato based on that which is genuinely seen? Could science provide us with the answers?

Course Reading:

Each week, you will be assigned papers or book chapters to read. These are all available on Blackboard. I only assign readings that are written by clever people. If a reading seems silly, or obviously false, it's not; take a step back and try to think carefully about the ideas being put forward and the specific reasons why the author endorses them. If – after thinking hard and charitably – a paper still seems wrong, or misguided, you might have a good objection! This is great! Please raise it in class or come discuss during my office hours!

Course Assessment:

Your work will be assessed based on:

- (1) Two take-home exams (each worth 25% of your final grade, and each pertaining to parts one and two of the course)
- (2) Ten 1-page summaries of the week's readings/course engagement (this is worth 10% of your final grade – in your summaries, it's fine to focus on a single reading, but these summaries must be submitted before the relevant Tuesday of class to your TA *plus* you must attend your seminars and engage with the discussion)
- (3) One 6-8 page paper (worth 40% of your final grade – due May 8th)

In all assignments, it is completely unacceptable to use the words or ideas of someone else without proper acknowledgment. If you are unsure what counts as plagiarism, see the Trojan Integrity Guide at <https://policy.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Code-of-Integrity-and->

[Accountability-Online-Version FINAL-7-21-2022.pdf](#) and the Undergraduate Guide for Avoiding Plagiarism at <https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/plagiarism>.

No less egregious is the use of ChatGPT. ChatGPT is very impressive and can produce nicely written essays that are often riddled with factual errors and bizarre statements. It's really important for your instructors and I to be able to check that *you* wrote your essays/responses, and not ChatGPT. **As such, you should be able to provide evidence to this effect.** While this is a pain for all involved, I recommend the following:

- You could write your essays/assignments on Google Docs. This will automatically save each change that is made to the file, thereby documenting its development (with the added bonus of automatically backing up your work!). The link can then be emailed to your instructors and I.
- You could keep notes, essay plans, or earlier drafts, and be ready to share these (in general, the more you redraft and plan an essay, the better it will be - it's often helpful to save drafts as separate documents anyway to permit bigger structural changes, etc.)
- You could come to my office hours to discuss the ideas you're developing.

I am sorry about having to do this!

Writing Philosophy Papers is Weird. We don't want a survey of everything you've read, or a bunch of unsupported opinions – we want you guys to provide a focused argument for a non-obvious claim (e.g., a claim that is rejected by some of the people we read about in class). If you're not familiar with writing philosophy papers, I *strongly* recommend looking at some of the following helpful resources:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

https://philosophy.fas.harvard.edu/files/phildept/files/brief_guide_to_writing_philosophy_paper.pdf

<http://www.sfu.ca/philosophy/resources/writing.html>

<https://www.mit.edu/~yablo/writing.html>

<https://www1.cmc.edu/pages/faculty/akind/intro01s/writing.htm>

*You don't need to read all of these – there is lots of overlap.

Other General Policies

Please don't use your laptops or other electronic devices in class – the internet is too tempting, and it will distract you. There is also evidence that you will remember your notes better if they are taken by hand: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>

Students with Disabilities

Students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability should register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) and email me about the requested accommodations. (DSP is located in GFS 120 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number is (213) 740-0776. See also <https://osas.usc.edu>.) Please get in touch if I can help.

Weekly readings and topics for discussion

(Further readings are marked with a ‘*’)

Part 1: The Nature of the Mind

Week 1: Descartes’ theory of the mind

T & Th: Descartes, R., *Meditations* II and VI.
Elisabeth of Bohemia, *Correspondence with Descartes* (6.v.1643, 10.v.1643)
*Kim, J. *Philosophy of Mind*, Chapters 1-2.

Week 2: Behaviorism

T & Th: Ryle, G., ‘Descartes’ Myth’
Putnam, H., “Brains and Behavior”
*Kim, J. *Philosophy of Mind*, Chapter 3.

Week 3: The Turing Test

T: Turing, A.M., “Computing Machinery and Intelligence”.
Block, N. “The Mind as the Software of the Brain” (Focus on Sect.1.1)
Th: Isaac, A. “Computational Thought from Descartes to Lovelace”
Kohs, G. (director) ‘AlphaGo’ (FILM – free to watch on YouTube)

Week 4: Is Machine Intelligence Possible?

T: Searle, J., ‘Minds, Brains and Programs’
*Chomsky, N. ‘The False Promise of ChatGPT’
Th: Dennett, D., ‘Cognitive Wheels: The Frame Problem of AI’

Week 4: But wait, what is the mind? Identity Theory and Functionalism

T: Smart, J.J.C., ‘Sensations and Brain Processes’
Th: Putnam, H. ‘The Nature of Mental States’
Polger, T. ‘Are Sensations Still Brain Processes?’, Section 4.
* Kim, J. *Philosophy of Mind*, Chapter 4-5

Week 6: Do Minds Extend?

T: Clark, A. & Chalmers, D. ‘The extended mind’
Clark, A. ‘Memento’s revenge’
Th: Sprevak, M. ‘Extended Cognition and Functionalism’
Gertler, B. ‘Overextending the Mind’
*Nolan, C. (director) ‘Memento’ (FILM)

Take home exam #1 set on Thursday of Week 6 – exam due Thursday of Week 7

Part 2: From Mind to Self

Week 7: What is Personal identity? Psychological Criteria

T & Th: Locke, J., "Of Identity and Diversity"
Reid, T. "Of Mr. Locke's Account of our Personal Identity"
*Korfmacher, C., "Personal Identity" (feel free to follow up on references)

Week 8: From psychological to physiological criteria

T & Th: Olson, E., "Self: Personal Identity"
Noonan, H., "Quasi-Memory"
Noonan, H., "Persons, Animals, and Human Beings"

Week 9: Another take on personal identity

T & Th: Parfit, D., "Personal Identity" (sections I-IV, VI)
Parfit, D., "Personal Identity, Rationality, and Morality" (sec. II)

Week 10: Split Brain Patients

T & Th: Schechter, E. "Précis of Self-Consciousness and 'Split' Brains: The Minds' I"
Bayne, T. "The unity of consciousness and the split-brain syndrome"

Take home exam #2 set on Thursday of Week 10 – exam due Thursday of Week 11

Part 3: Consciousness**Week 11: Is consciousness a counterexample to physicalism?**

T: Nagel, T., 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?'
Chalmers, D. 'Facing up to the Problem of Consciousness', secs. 1-4
Th: Jackson, F., 'Epiphenomenal Qualia'
Levin, J., 'Do Conceivability Arguments against Physicalism Beg the Question?'

Week 12: Is a science of consciousness possible?

T & Th: Block, N. 'On a confusion about a function of consciousness'
Cohen, M. & Dennett, D. 'Consciousness cannot be separated from function'
Irvine, E. 'Measures of Consciousness'

Week 13: How much do we visually experience?

T & Th: Block, N. 'Perceptual consciousness overflows cognitive access'
Phillips, I. 'Perception and Iconic Memory: What Sperling Doesn't Show'

Week 14: Which properties do we experience?

T & Th: Siegel, S. 'Which properties are represented in perception?'
Price, R. 'Aspect-switching and visual phenomenal character'
*Hawley, K. & Macpherson, F. Introduction to 'The Admissible Contents of Experience'

Week 15: Unconscious Perception

T & Th: Peters, M. et al. 'Does Unconscious Perception Really Exist?'

Phillips, I. 'Consciousness and Criterion: On Block's Case for Unconscious Seeing'

Final Paper due May 8th