

PHIL 250-002: Minds and Machines Syllabus

Summer Term 1 2023
University of British Columbia



Delivery Method: In person lectures

Class Meetings: Mondays and Wednesdays, 13:00-16:00 in Buchanan D201

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor: Elena Holmgren

Email: elenahm@mail.ubc.ca

Office Hours: By Zoom. Please email to set up an appointment.

COURSE INFORMATION

Description:

Conscious experience is arguably at once the most familiar and intimately-known phenomenon and the most elusive for philosophical theorizing. Just what *is* the conscious mind, and what is its place in the natural world? And how does conscious experience relate to both the brain and the body? To answer these questions, philosophers have variously characterized consciousness as an immaterial entity (substance dualism), a brain structure (brain identity theory), a kind of program (computational functionalism), a mysterious non-physical property (property dualism), embodied activity in the world (enactivism), a theoretical fiction (eliminative materialism), and as the foundation for all possible knowledge (phenomenological philosophy of mind).

This course will introduce you to these dominant accounts of the conscious mind and will provide you with the means to critically evaluate the strengths and limitations of each. It will invite you to approach each theory of mind as a lens you can take on your mind, allowing you to clarify some features of your mind while obscuring others. We will explore each of these approaches through an in-depth study of historic and contemporary papers arguing for these views. Lastly, the course will explore how these different theories of consciousness shape how we think about the possibility of conscious machines and what we take the prospects of a scientific explanation of conscious experience to be.

Since there are no prerequisites for this course, no prior experience with philosophy will be assumed.

Learning Objectives:

Aside from introducing students to some of the most influential philosophical theories of the mind, the larger goal of this course is to give students a sense of what philosophy is like as an activity with its own characteristic set of skills. Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Identify, explain, critically evaluate and construct arguments concerning the nature of the mind;
- Identify and critically evaluate the strengths and limitations of arguments contained in core philosophical texts;
- Identify and evaluate historically-dominant foundational assumptions concerning the mind that we still take for granted today and that influence our self-understanding;
- engage in dialogue by exercising ***the principle of charity***; that is, internalizing others' perspectives and understanding them in their most rhetorically-forceful and aesthetically-appealing light (regardless of how antithetical to our own these views may be) prior to critiquing them.

Course Materials:

No textbook is required. All readings will be posted on our Canvas course website:

<https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/118248>

The readings are located in "Modules" -> "Course Readings."

ASSESSMENTS

General Assignment Instructions:

All assignments test your understanding of content covered *in this class*. Thus, assignments should show evidence of engagement with the material *as covered in class*. That being said, be sure to explain the content *in your own words*, rather than merely replicating lectures in your responses.

I strongly discourage you from relying on internet searches to look up material for this class. The chances that you will find quality information relevant to our particular class discussions of the course material through Googling are vanishingly small.

Assignment and Date:	Weighting:
Test 1: May 31	30%
Test 2: June 14	30%
Final Exam: to be scheduled during the final exam period	30%
Weekly Group Discussion Worksheets: distributed during various class periods; dates not announced ahead of time.	10%

Tests:

Arguably the best way to cement your understanding of the philosophical theories we will be discussing is to write about them. By writing about these theories, you can hone your critical thinking skills required to weigh their respective strengths and weaknesses.

To this end, each test consists of a list of prompts, of which you can select one and construct an essay response to it. All tests (including the final exam) for this course will be closed-book and must be completed in class. You will have two hours to complete tests 1 and 2, and 3 hours to complete the final exam. For the tests and the final exam, you are responsible for all the required readings and class lectures.

The questions for Tests 1 and 2 will be released a few days ahead of time, so that you can have a chance to gather together your thoughts on the prompt. Moreover, I encourage you to write a rough outline or plan of your response to the test prompt you have chosen in order to have a sense of the structure of your response before you come to write your test in person. **However, you cannot bring your outline or any other notes to the test.**

Group Discussion Worksheets:

Philosophy is best learned through practice and dialogue. To this end, active participation in our weekly discussion activities is essential. These activities are designed to help you develop the critical thinking skills that are essential not just for doing well in this course and on the assignments, but also for learning to do philosophy for yourself, which ultimately matters more than simply memorizing and reproducing the results of other people's philosophizing.

The discussion activities are also designed to train your ability to articulate your views clearly, to provide argumentative support for your views, to question your most taken-for-granted assumptions, and to internalize other perspectives (as opposed as they may seem to your own!) before identifying their strengths and shortcomings. Students are expected to engage respectfully with all opposing views presented in class discussions.

Your grade for this course component will be based on the level of your constructive engagement in the weekly discussions, and on your completion of **5 discussion worksheets (7 will be distributed in total)**. Discussion worksheets will be graded on a Pass/Fail basis, and each is worth 2%. You must attend class in order to submit your worksheet.

EXPECTATIONS

I expect you to come to class prepared to discuss the assigned readings, take notes, ask questions, complete assignments on time, practice academic integrity, and engage in respectful and productive reasoned dialogue with peers.

Email me *any time* if you require any clarification at all, or if you just wish to chat about philosophy of mind!

Regular Lecture Attendance and Good Study Habits:

Since each and every lecture is designed to give you the theoretical tools needed to unpack the course readings and prepare you for the assignments, regular attendance is necessary in order to do well in this course. If you miss any class, you are responsible for acquiring any content we covered, either by referring to the slides posted on our Canvas website, by asking a fellow student to share their notes, or by emailing me or visiting me during my office hours.

Moreover, taking detailed notes is essential for cementing your understanding of the content. It is also advisable to review and organize your notes regularly by highlighting important overarching themes that came up, as well as summarizing (in your own words) the different theorists' takes on these themes. Then, make note of any **key claims** made by the authors we have discussed, as well as noting the **key arguments** they have presented in support of those claims. Also, make note of any **definitions** introduced, as well as of any **examples** that helped clarify any key concepts we covered. Lastly, make sure to take note of the areas where you **agree** and **disagree** with the authors. For each major author and theory we cover, jot down the "pros" and "cons" of adopting their view. Doing all this will greatly assist you when preparing for the tests.

Active Close Reading:

Students are expected to read all assigned materials before the start of the first class of each week. Readings are essential preparation for our discussion activities.

Few things train and focus the mind quite as well as the practice of close reading does. This practice involves two complementary movements of thought: the first "zooms in" to closely analyze and evaluate the various steps in an argument, while the second "zooms out" to

consider how the particular passage at hand, and the text as a whole, each shed light on significant big-picture themes. As we go through the course, you will have ample chance to work on cultivating these close reading skills.

These can be quite challenging and richly-layered texts. Thus, aim to read each assigned work *at least twice*: first, read it once over in order to get a general “bird’s eye” overview of the topics discussed. Then, re-read it at least one time in order to get a more detailed grasp of the different steps in the argument/s presented.

In order to *read actively*, briefly summarize the key points of the reading in your own words. Focus your reading by identifying the core claim (or conclusion) that the author is trying to argue for. Then, identify the claims provided in support of that conclusion. Can you identify any problems with any of these claims? If so, make note of them.

As you read, try and *internalize* each view presented. That is, consider how your mind appears when seen through the lens of each of these theories. Then, try and think of the strengths and blindspots of each of these philosophical perspectives on your mind: What problems does each of them solve? What problems does it create? What does it clarify? What does it fail to account for?

SCHEDULE

The following schedule and course components are subject to change with reasonable advance notice, as deemed appropriate by the instructor.

WEEK and DATE	TOPICS and ACTIVITIES	READINGS
1. May 15	Introduction to Philosophy of Mind: The Problem of Consciousness	None
1. May 17	Consciousness As Foundation	-René Descartes: “Meditations I & II”
2. May 22	<i>Victoria Day: No Class</i>	None
2. May 24	Objections to Descartes Behaviourism The Rise of Physicalism	-Gilbert Ryle: “Descartes’ Myth” -J.J.C. Smart: “Sensations and Brain Processes”
3. May 29	What Consciousness Does:	-Jerry Fodor: “The Mind-Body

	Functionalism	Problem”
3. May 31	TEST 1 Lecture: The Explanatory Gap and The Hard Problem of Consciousness	-Thomas Nagel: “What Is It Like To Be A Bat?”
4. June 5	The Explanatory Gap and the Hard Problem of Consciousness Cont’d	-David Chalmers: “Facing Up To the Hard Problem” – up to Section 7 (first 15 pages only) -David Borkenhagen: “Octopus Time”
4. June 7	<i>Is There a Hard Problem of Consciousness?</i>	Required: -Patricia Churchland: “The Hornswoggle Problem” -Paul Churchland: “The Rediscovery of Light” Optional: Elizabeth Irvine: “Explaining What?” Elanor Taylor: “Explanation and the Explanatory Gap”
5. June 12	Conscious Machines	-John Searle: “Minds, Brains and Programs”
5. June 14	Test 2 Embodied, Extended, Enactive Cognitive Science	-Andy Clark and David Chalmers: “The Extended Mind”
6. June 19	Embodied, Extended, Enactive Cognitive Science, cont’d The Frame Problem for Artificial Intelligence	-Evan Thompson and Mog Stapleton: “Making Sense of Sense-Making: Reflections on Enactive and Extended Mind Theories” -Michael Wheeler: “Cognition in Context: Phenomenology, Situated Robotics and the Frame Problem”
6. June 21	Last Day of Class: Phenomenological Philosophy of Mind Conclusion: Is philosophy of mind	Required: -Zahavi and Gallagher: excerpt from The Phenomenological Mind -Zahavi: “Intentionality and Phenomenality: A Phenomenological

	<p>nothing more than a war of metaphors?</p> <p><i>Final Exam: To be scheduled in the final exam period (June 26-30)</i></p>	<p>Take on the Hard Problem”</p> <p><i>Optional:</i> -“The Mind” - Excerpt from George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s <i>Philosophy in the Flesh</i></p>
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POLICIES

Academic Integrity:

By enrolling in this course, you are responsible for familiarizing yourself and complying with the university’s policy on academic integrity. Ignorance is no excuse. Read:

<https://learningcommons.ubc.ca/understand-academic-integrity/>

As a part of a research community, you are responsible for engaging with existing knowledge and contributing ideas of your own. Academics—including you!—build knowledge through rigorous research that expands on the contributions of others, both in the faraway past and around the world today. This is called scholarship. Academic integrity, in short, means being an honest, diligent, and responsible scholar. This includes:

- Creating and expressing your own original ideas
- Explicitly acknowledging the sources of your knowledge, especially through accurate citation practices
- Completing assignments independently or acknowledging collaboration when appropriate
- Taking exams without cheating

Academic Misconduct:

<https://vancouver.calendar.ubc.ca/campus-wide-policies-and-regulations/student-conduct-and-discipline/discipline-academic-misconduct/3-academic-misconduct-ubc-students>

Academic misconduct includes any conduct by which a student gains or attempts to gain an unfair academic advantage or benefit thereby compromising the integrity of the academic process, or helping or attempting to help another person commit an act of academic misconduct or gain, or attempt to gain, an unfair academic advantage.

Academic Concession:

If you miss an in-class test for a reason that the university recognizes as warranting a concession (e.g., illness, family emergency, religious observation, etc.), immediately submit a Student Self-Declaration form to me so that your in-term concession case can be evaluated. You can download the form here:

<https://www.arts.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/24/2019/10/Student-Self-Declaration-Form-1.6-Arts.pdf>

If this is not the first time you have requested concession or classes are over, fill out Arts Academic Advising's online academic concession form immediately, so that an advisor can evaluate your concession case. If you are a student in a different Faculty, please consult your Faculty's webpage on academic concession, and then contact me where appropriate.

Academic Accommodation:

Academic accommodations help students with a disability or ongoing medical condition overcome challenges that may affect their academic success. Students requiring academic accommodations must register with the Centre for Accessibility (previously known as Access & Diversity). The Centre will determine that student's eligibility for accommodations in accordance with Policy LR7: Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities. Academic accommodations are not determined by your instructors, and instructors should not ask you about the nature of your disability or ongoing medical condition, or request copies of your disability documentation. However, your instructor may consult with the Centre for Accessibility should the accommodations affect the essential learning outcomes of a course.