

## **PHIL 455 Topics in the Philosophy of Cognitive Science**

Professor Eric Margolis

We will look at a range of questions about the overall structure of the mind where the best research is equally grounded in developments in philosophy and the cognitive sciences. For example: Are there parts of the mind that are inaccessible to introspection? Do people with radically different background theories perceive the world in different ways? Is language essential to some forms of cognition? What is the format of the mental representations that make up thoughts? What features of the mind generate implicit bias? How do human and (non-human) animal minds differ?

### **Prerequisites**

PHIL441 Philosophy of Perception), or PHIL451 (Philosophy of Mind), or 6 credits of Philosophy at the 200 level or above (excluding PHIL 220 and PHIL 320). Priority will be given to 4th year Philosophy majors, 4th year Cogs majors, and students with background in cognitive science. If you don't meet the prerequisite, you may request permission to take the course. Email me using the subject line "PHIL455 permission request".

### **Course Format**

This course will be organized as a seminar, emphasizing class discussion. Attendance is required, and each seminar participant is expected to be substantively involved in the discussion each week. This isn't the type of course where it's okay to skip classes or passively listen to a lecture.

### **Readings**

Usually one article or book chapter per week. Some of these will be by philosophers, some by cognitive scientists. The exact readings will depend on the topics the class settles on—there will be some choices.

### **Grades and Assignments**

There is some flexibility here—I will ask for student input. But one of the assignments will be a final research project that either takes the form of a 3,000 word philosophy paper, a video presentation, or some combination of the two. I also often include a shorter paper or video assignment earlier in the course and brief written reactions to weekly readings. Here is a tentative grading scheme:

- 5% greeting video
- 25% Participation (in class & online)
- 10% Short paper
- 10% Video presentation of short paper
- 25% Research paper (due date 4)
- 25% Video presentation of research paper

### **The Research Project**

The goal of this assignment is to help you develop a deeper understanding of a current debate in the philosophy of cognitive science, to make an original contribution to this debate, and to give you the experience of working on a project that approximates what it would be like to write a philosophy journal article or present your ideas at a conference. For this assignment, you are not expected to do the kind of research that requires an extensive online search or reading many articles; the point of

this assignment isn't to report on the latest findings or to assimilate a large literature. Instead, the research you will be doing will take the form of a critical analysis of the material that appears in a small set of readings covering a topic that relates to our course. This will usually mean working with about three articles that present different perspectives on your topic. You are free to agree or disagree with any of the authors you discuss. But regardless of your approach, it isn't enough to merely report on what these authors say or how their views differ. Your job is to find something in this material to comment on in such a way that you make a contribution to the debate. In class we will discuss general strategies for how to get started, how to formulate a suitable thesis, how to develop an original line of argument, how to structure your paper / presentation, and we will also cover the norms pertaining to advanced philosophical writing / presentations.