Syllabus: Minds, Machines, and Persons
Fall 2015

Instructor: Cameron Domenico Kirk-Giannini
Office: Philosophy Department Room 514, 106 Somerset Street, 5th Floor
Office Hours: Wednesday 3:00-4:15 pm (and by appointment)
Email: mmpfall15@gmail.com (all assignments should be submitted to this address)
Classroom: Frelinghuysen Hall B-6
Class Hours: Monday and Wednesday 4:30-5:50 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 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 a 1500-2100 word final paper. A two-page synopsis of this paper will be due approximately three weeks prior to the paper itself. Third, there will be a take-home exam consisting of a number of short
essay responses during the reading days between the end of classes and the beginning of examinations. 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%
- Two-page synopsis of final paper: 10%
- Final paper: 40%

Semester Overview

Part I: The Computational Theory of Cognition

Week 1:
Reading: None
Wednesday, September 2nd: Introduction
Assignment: Week 2 reading response due by midnight EST on Saturday, September 5th

Week 2:
Reading: Jerry Fodor, *Psychosemantics*, Ch 1 (pages 1-17)
**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8TH:** Fodor Scrutinized (Discussion)
Wednesday, September 9th: Representation and Computation (Lecture)
Assignment: Week 3 reading response due by midnight EST on Saturday, September 12th

Week 3:
Reading: Jerry Fodor, *Psychosemantics*, Ch 1 (pages 18-25), Appendix
Monday, September 14th: Fodor Scrutinized Again (Discussion)
Wednesday, September 16th: The Computational Theory of Cognition (Lecture)
Assignment: Week 4 reading response due by midnight EST on Saturday, September 19th

Week 4:
Reading: Stephen Stich, *From Folk Psychology to Cognitive Science*, Ch 8
Monday, September 21st: Stich Scrutinized (Discussion)
Wednesday, September 23rd: Stich’s Syntactic Theory (Lecture)
Assignment: Week 5 reading response due by midnight EST on Saturday, September 26th
Week 5:
Reading: Frances Egan, “Computation and Content”
Monday, September 28th: Egan Scrutinized (Discussion)
Wednesday, September 30th: Content or Discontent? (Lecture)
Assignment: Week 6 reading response due by midnight EST on Saturday, October 3rd

Part II: How Do Representations Get Their Contents?

Week 6:
Reading: Ruth Garrett Millikan, “Biosemantics”
Monday, October 5th: Millikan Scrutinized (Discussion)
Wednesday, October 7th: Teleological Theories of Mental Content (Lecture)
Assignment: Week 7 reading response due by midnight EST on Saturday, October 10th

Week 7:
Reading: Jerry Fodor, “A Theory of Content, II: The Theory”
Monday, October 12th: Fodor Scrutinized Once More (Discussion)
Wednesday, October 14th: Asymmetric Dependency Theories of Mental Content (Lecture)
Assignment: Week 8 reading response due by midnight EST on Saturday, October 17th

Week 8:
Reading: Ned Block, “Advertisement for a Semantics for Psychology”
Monday, October 19th: Block Scrutinized (Discussion)
Wednesday, October 21st: Functional Theories of Mental Content (Lecture)
Assignment: Week 9 reading response due by midnight EST on Saturday, October 24th

Part III: Is Computation Enough?

Week 9:
Reading: John Searle, “Minds, Brains, and Programs”
Monday, October 26th: Searle Scrutinized (Discussion)
Wednesday, October 28th: The Chinese Room (Lecture)
Assignment: Week 10 reading response due by midnight EST on Saturday, October 31st
Week 10:
Reading: Frank Jackson, “Epiphenomenal Qualia”
Monday, November 2nd: Jackson Scrutinized (Discussion)
Wednesday, November 4th: The Knowledge Argument (Lecture)
Assignment: Week 11 reading response due by midnight EST on Saturday, November 7th

Week 11:
Reading: Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?”
Monday, November 9th: Nagel Scrutinized (Discussion)
Wednesday, November 11th: Other Problems for Completeness (Lecture)
Assignment: Week 12 reading response due by midnight EST on Saturday, November 14th

Part IV: Challenges to the Computational Theory of Cognition

Week 12:
Reading: Patricia Smith Churchland, “Language, Thought, and Information Processing”
Monday, November 16th: Churchland Scrutinized (Discussion)
Wednesday, November 18th: Eliminative Materialism (Lecture)
ASSIGNMENT: TWO-PAGE SYNOPSIS OF FINAL PAPER DUE BY MIDNIGHT EST ON WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18TH
Assignment: Week 13 reading response due by midnight EST on Saturday, November 21st

Week 13:
Reading: Lawrence Shapiro, *Embodied Cognition*, Ch 2
Monday, November 23rd: Shapiro Scrutinized (Discussion)
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 25TH: NO CLASS
Assignment: Week 14 reading response due by midnight EST on Saturday, November 28th

Week 14:
Reading: Lawrence Shapiro, *Embodied Cognition*, Ch 5
Monday, November 30th: Shapiro Scrutinized Again (Discussion)
Wednesday, December 2nd: The Embodiment Challenge (Lecture)
Assignment: TBD
Week 15:
Reading: TBD
Monday, December 7th: Breathing Room
Wednesday, December 9th: Breathing Room
ASSIGNMENT: FINAL PAPER DUE BY MIDNIGHT EST ON WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9TH
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11TH: TAKE-HOME EXAM GOES LIVE AT 12 PM EST
MONDAY, DECEMBER 14TH: TAKE-HOME EXAM RESPONSES DUE AT 12 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 1/3-letter-grade penalty per day late (a 1/3-letter-grade drop is the difference between an A and a B+ and between a B and a B-).

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.
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.

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/.