

PHILOSOPHY OF MIND AND COGNITIVE SCIENCE  
PHIL 30400, FALL 2018: TENTATIVE SYLLABUS

Dr. Devin Sanchez Curry

dcurry@wooster.edu

Class sessions: Scovel 205, M/W 2:00–3:20

Office hours: Scovel 002, T/W 10:00–10:50

The first unit of this introduction to the philosophical and scientific study of cognition and consciousness will address metaphysical questions: *what's the relation between minds and brains? Can machines think, feel, or act? How are cognitive systems organized?* The second unit will address epistemological questions: *how do you know that other people have minds? How can psychologists and neuroscientists study human and animal minds? And how well do we know our own minds, anyway?* The course will culminate in each student researching a mental state or process of their choosing.

**Required books**

Jerry Fodor, *The Modularity of Mind* (MIT Press 1983)

Eric Schwitzgebel, *Perplexities of Consciousness* (MIT Press 2011)

**Brief grading breakdown**

Participation: 6%

Position paper: 12% (due 9/5)

Take-home exam: 30% (due 10/15)

Thesis paper: 12% (due 11/5)

Literature review: 10% (due 11/19)

Final paper: 30% (due 12/12)

**Brief schedule**

Day 1: Can thermometers feel? Can computers think? Can robots do things for reasons?

**Metaphysics of Cognition and Consciousness**

Week 1: The mind-body problem: dualism, materialism, and behaviorism

Week 2: The mind/brain identity theory

Week 3: Functionalism

Week 4: Cognitive architecture

Week 5: Computationalism and the modularity of mind

Week 6: Central cognition and real patterns

**Epistemology of Cognition and Consciousness**

Week 7: Problems of other minds

Week 8: Methodological issues in cognitive ethology and evolutionary psychology

Week 9: Methodological issues in social psychology and cognitive neuroscience

Week 10: Perplexities of perceptual experience

Week 11: Introspection

Week 12: Mental imagery

**Mental states**

Weeks 13–14: Student generated content

## Detailed grading breakdown

### Position paper (12%)

A 500–750 word position paper will be due before an in-class debate on 9/5. On 8/29, you will join a group tasked with defending either substance dualism, dispositionalism, or the mind-brain identity theory. You will then write a paper consisting of an argument for your assigned theory of the mind-body relation (6% of your grade), as well as objections to each of the other two theories (3% each). These arguments and objections should be accurate and clear reformulations, *in your own words*, of material from class readings, lectures, and discussions.

### Take-home exam (30%)

A take-home exam on the metaphysics of mind will be due on 10/15. The exam will consist of three essay prompts, each to be answered in 500–750 words (and each worth 10% of your grade). You must answer each part of each prompt to receive full credit.

### Thesis paper (12%)

A 500–750 word thesis paper about a methodological issue in cognitive science will be due on 11/5. In this paper, you will devise an original argument (either for a novel conclusion or using novel premises in support of another author's conclusion) and consider an objection to your argument. You will be graded on the validity of your argument (3%), the persuasiveness of your reasoning (3%), the thoughtfulness of the objection to your own argument (3%), and the strength of your reply to that objection (3%).

### Literature review (10%)

A 500–750 word review of extant philosophical literature on the topic of your final paper will be due on 11/19. You must come to office hours before fall break to discuss potential topics. Once we have settled on a topic, I will suggest readings. However, your literature review must also feature an article or book chapter that I have not suggested. You will be graded on how accurately (5%) and clearly (5%) you explain the main theses and arguments in the literature. Your literature review will be required reading on 11/26, 11/28, 12/3, or 12/5.

### Final paper (30%)

A 1,000–2,000 word final paper will be due on 12/12. You will be graded on how well you show off the skills developed through and tested by the previous class assignments.

### Participation (6%)

2% of your grade will be based on contributions to an in-class debate on 9/5. An additional 1% per session will be awarded for helping classmates brainstorm final papers during the classes on 11/26, 11/28, 12/3, and 12/5. (You will *not* be graded on how well you brainstorm your own paper topic.)

In addition, daily class participation will be the determining factor if you end up on the borderline between two grades (e.g. B+/A-). Some tips: come to each class having read—and, if necessary for comprehension, reread—the assigned readings. Ask questions. Contribute to class

discussion when you have something to say. Listen to your peers carefully and respectfully whether or not you have something to say.

**Sample final paper topics** (in no particular order)

Belief	Desire	Reasoning
Concepts	Mental speech	Episodic memory
Procedural memory	Imagination	Pain
Pleasure	Mindreading	Mental content
Perceptual content	Perceptual phenomenology	Mental imagery
Qualia	Temporal experience	Bodily experience
Attention	Emotions	A specific emotion
The self	Character traits	Mind wandering
Creativity	Intelligence	Dreams
Unconscious states	Animal mental states	Animal consciousness

**Policies**

**Due dates and extensions**

Hard copies of all assignments are due at the beginning of class. If you need an extension of the deadline for the take-home exam, thesis paper, literature review, or final paper, please ask in writing in advance of the deadline (a brief email is fine). I will grant a 48-hour grace period, no questions asked. If you need more than two extra days, you must set up an appointment to meet with me and devise a concrete plan for finishing the assignment.

**Late assignments**

Unless an extension is granted, assignments will be penalized one third of a letter grade for each day they are late.

**Plagiarism**

Don't do it. Exercise academic integrity, as defined by the Code of Academic Integrity published in *The Scot's Key*. Plagiarism (or abetting another student plagiarizing) will result in an automatic zero on the plagiarized assignment, as well as an official report. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please consult the Academic Integrity Online Handbook and/or ask me.

**Accommodations**

If you have good reason to be exempt from (or subject to a modified version of) any policy on this syllabus, please let me know. We'll work something out.

Any student may schedule sessions at the Learning Center (ext. 2595) to take advantage of services designed to help improve academic performance. The Learning Center also offers a variety of services to students with disabilities. Students with disabilities should meet with Pam Rose (prose@wooster.edu), Director of the Learning Center, at the start of the semester to discuss reasonable accommodations.

## Detailed schedule

8/22: Can thermometers feel? Can computers think? Can robots do things for reasons?

**Reading:** Handout on consciousness, intentionality, and agency

### Metaphysics of Cognition and Consciousness

8/27: The mind-body problem, dualism, and materialism

**Reading:** Descartes, *Discourse on Method* and *Principles of Philosophy* (selections)  
Elisabeth of Bohemia, Correspondence with Descartes (selection)

8/29: Behaviorism and dispositionalism

**Reading:** Skinner, *Verbal Behavior* (selection)  
Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (selection)

9/3: The mind/brain identity theory

**Reading:** Place, "Is Consciousness a Brain Process?"

9/5: Class debate

**Reading:** None (position papers due)

9/10: Cognitivism and multiple realizability

**Reading:** Chomsky, "A Review of B.F. Skinner's *Verbal Behavior*" (selection)  
Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" (selection)

9/12: Functionalism

**Reading:** Putnam, "The Nature of Mental States"

9/17: Levels of psychological explanation

**Reading:** Marr, *Vision* (selection)  
Drayson, "The Personal/Subpersonal Distinction"

9/19: Mental architecture

**Reading:** Fodor, "Four Accounts of Mental Structure"

9/24: Computationalism and its rivals

**Reading:** Fodor, "A Functional Taxonomy of Cognitive Mechanisms"  
Hatfield, "Cognition"

9/26: Modularity

**Reading:** Fodor, "Input Systems as Modules"

10/1: Central cognition

**Reading:** Fodor, "Central Systems" and "Caveats and Conclusions"

10/3: Intentional realism(s)

**Reading:** Dennett, "Real Patterns"

### Epistemology of Cognition and Consciousness

10/15: Problems of other minds

**Reading:** Nagel, "What is it like to be a Bat?" pages 435–442 (take-homes due)

10/17: The (hard?) problem of consciousness

**Reading:** Nagel, "What is it like to be a Bat?" pages 443–450

Churchland, "The Hornswoggle Problem"

10/22: Methodological issues in cognitive ethology

**Reading:** Andrews, "Chimpanzee Mindreading: Don't Stop Believing"

10/24: Methodological issues in evolutionary psychology

**Reading:** Lloyd, "Evolutionary Psychology: The Burdens of Proof"

10/29: Methodological issues in social and cognitive psychology

**Reading:** Henrich et al., "The Weirdest People in the World?"

10/31: Methodological issues in cognitive neuroscience

**Reading:** Fodor, "Is Cognitive Neuroscience a Waste of Time?"

Farah, "Brain Images, Babies, and Bathwater: Critiquing Critiques of Functional Neuroimaging"

11/5: Dreaming

**Reading:** Schwitzgebel, "Recoloring the Dreamworld" (argumentative papers due)

11/7: Perceptual experience

**Reading:** Schwitzgebel, "Do Things Look Flat?" and "Human Echolocation"

11/12: Introspection

**Reading:** Schwitzgebel, "Titchener's Introspective Training Manual" and "Do you Have Constant Tactile Experience of your Feet in your Shoes?"

11/14: Skepticism about introspection

**Reading:** Schwitzgebel, "The Unreliability of Naïve Introspection"

11/19: Mental imagery

**Reading:** Schwitzgebel, "When your Eyes are Closed, what do you See?" (reviews due)

### **Mental states and processes**

11/26: Student generated content

**Reading:** Literature reviews

11/28: Student generated content

**Reading:** Literature reviews

12/3: Student generated content

**Reading:** Literature reviews

12/5: Student generated content

**Reading:** Literature reviews

12/12: Final papers due