

SYLLABUS

Minds and Machines

Spring 2020.

<https://minds-and-machines.jacksonkernion.com>

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to the central questions in philosophy of mind. It is divided into three parts: 1) Historical Foundations, 2) Consciousness, 3) Cognition and Representation. The sorts of questions we will discuss: What kinds of things are mental states (e.g. thoughts, beliefs, desires, sensations, feelings)? Is the mind just the brain? (What else could it be?!) Can a science of the brain answer all of our questions about the mind? What is consciousness, and how is it related to the physical world? How is the mind able to represent the world and reason about it?

ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Peer Review.** Satisfactory/unsatisfactory. (4%)
For Paper 1, you'll provide feedback on the papers of two other students in your section. Instructions will be provided. You'll discuss these in section.
2. **Weekly Question/Topic Submissions.** Satisfactory/unsatisfactory. (4%) Every week, there will be a "Wk *n*: Questions/Topics" thread posted to the discussion board. Submit at least one question/topic before Fridays at 12pm EST.
3. **Paper 1.** 600-800 words. (15%)
A short exegetical paper. Choose one passage (from two) to analyze.
4. **Take-Home Midterm Exam.** ~1500 words. (20%)
Answer two questions (from four), ~750 words each. 48-hour time limit.
5. **Paper 2.** 1000-1200 words. (25%)
An argumentative essay. Choose one topic (from three).
6. **Paper 3.** 1900-2100 words. (32%)
A longer argumentative essay. Choose one topic (from three).

This course *still* fulfills the CI-H (Communication Intensive in the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences) requirement.

We'll say more about how to approach these assignments, how they'll be assessed, and how to turn them in when the topics are announced.

Assignments will receive letter grades. Final grades will be calculated on a 4.0 scale, by using the percentages indicated above to weight the different assignments. Final grades will not be curved.

NOT-QUITE ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Enrollment Survey.** If you're enrolled, or would like to enroll, fill out this survey:
<http://jacksonkernion.com/minds-and-machines/enrollment-survey>

2. **Introductory Office Hours.** You are encouraged to drop by my office hours in first couple weeks, just to say hi and introduce yourself. We can talk about the purpose of office hours, and you can tell me what you anticipate needing the most help with.
3. **Mid-Semester Survey.** I'll send out a mid-semester survey after 5 weeks or so, to check in on how the course is going and to catch anything that ought to be changed.
4. **Attendance.** I'm not a cop, so attendance is not strictly required. But if, as the semester progresses, in-class discussion fades off, I will revisit this policy. Ideally, you will find that class participation is a good way to test out your ideas and learn the skills you'll need for the assignments in a low stakes, casual setting.

COURSE POLICIES

Weekly Announcements. Usually on Sundays (but sometimes on Mondays) I will post a new "Wk *n*: ..." announcement to the forum. I'll point your attention to the most important things for that upcoming week. These announcements, plus this syllabus, are my Official Decrees, as benevolent dictator of this course. If you are taking this course, I will assume that you have carefully read this syllabus, and that you will carefully read each of these "Wk *n*: ..." updates. (If there's any important mid-week news, I will edit the forum post and add an 'updates' section below the initial announcement.)

How to Contact Us. For *personal issues*: email me (jk@jacksonkernion.com) or your TA. For anything else, try to find a relevant thread and add a reply in the discussion forum. If you're not sure where to ask a question, ask it by replying to the most recent "Wk *n*: ..." thread.

Device Policy. Having a device in front of you can take your mind out of the discussion and make you less likely to participate. It can also distract others. But, again, I am not a cop. You'll be provided handouts for lecture, so you don't need to take detailed notes. I recommend just listening and participating. For various reasons, some students may prefer taking notes on a device. So here's the policy: you'll be asked to state your own personal device-use policy in the course enrollment survey, and you'll be asked on the mid-semester survey whether you've stuck to your personal policy. Also, I ask that those using devices not sit towards the front of class.

Three Free Late Days Before Late Penalties. You'll each have three 'late days' to use as you see fit on your paper assignments (*not on the midterm or peer reviews*). To use one or more of your late days on an assignment, you must contact your TA at least 24 hours before the assignment deadline. Once your three late days have been used, extensions will be granted only in *extreme* circumstances. For each day late beyond the effective deadline, your grade will decrease by one third of a letter grade (i.e. B+ to B). Late midterms/peer reviews will *not* be accepted for credit.

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism. Make sure you're familiar with [MIT's academic misconduct policy](#). How that policy defines plagiarism:

Plagiarism occurs when you use another's words, ideas, assertions, data, or figures and do not acknowledge that you have done so.

If you submit plagiarized work, you will receive an 'F' for the assignment and a letter will be sent to the Committee on Discipline documenting your dishonesty. If you find yourself in a difficult situation and are unsure how to finish an assignment before a deadline, please speak to me, or your TA. We can help you handle the situation.

Course FAQs. You will find a "Course FAQs" thread in the online forum. If anything about 'how this course works' is still unclear, check there. If you checked there, and you still have questions, please ask in that thread! I will add additional FAQ entries based of your Qs.

SCHEDULE

MAIN TEXT

D. Chalmers, (ed.) *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (“PM”)

UNIT I: HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

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|---|---------------------------|-------------|
| 1. Overview of Course | | MON, FEB 3 |
| 2. Dualism and its Relatives
Descartes, <i>Meditations</i> (Excerpt in PM)
Elisabeth of Bohemia, Correspondence with Descartes (Excerpts on Website) | | WED, FEB 5 |
| 3. Epiphenomenalism
Huxley, “On the Hypothesis That Animals are Automata” (PM) | | MON, FEB 10 |
| 4. Logical Behaviorism 1
Ryle, “Descartes’ Myth” (PM) | <i>Announced: Paper 1</i> | WED, FEB 12 |
| 5. Logical Behaviorism 2
Carnap, “Psychology in Physical Language” (Excerpt in PM)
Putnam, “Brains and Behavior” (PM) | | TUE, FEB 18 |
| 6. Identity Theory
Smart, “Sensations and Brain Processes” (PM)
Place, “Is Consciousness a Brain Process?” (PM) | | WED, FEB 19 |
| | <i>Due: Paper 1</i> | FRI, FEB 21 |
| 7. From Identity Theory to Functionalism
Armstrong, “The Causal Theory of the Mind” (PM) | | MON, FEB 24 |
| 8. Functionalism 1
Putnam, “The Nature of Mental States” (PM) | | WED, FEB 26 |
| 9. Functionalism 2
Block, “Troubles with Functionalism” (PM) | | MON, MAR 2 |

UNIT II: CONSCIOUSNESS

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| 10. Qualia
Jackson, “Epiphenomenal Qualia” (PM)
Lewis, “What Experience Teaches” (PM) | <i>Announced: Midterm</i> | WED, MAR 4 |
| | <i>Due: Midterm</i> | FRI, MAR 6 |
| 11. First-Person vs. Third-Person 1
Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” (PM) | | MON, MAR 9 |

After cancellation of in-person courses...

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| 12. First-Person vs. Third-Person 2
Block, “Concepts of Consciousness” (PM) | | MON, MAR 30 |
| 13. Inverted Spectrum
Nida-Rümelin, “Pseudonormal Vision” (PM) | | WED, APR 1 |

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| 14. The Hard Problem
Chalmers, "Consciousness and Its Place in Nature" (PM) | <i>Announced: Paper 2</i> | MON, APR 6 |
| 15. Illusionism
Frankish, "Illusionism as a Theory of Consciousness" (Website) | | WED, APR 8 |
| 16. Scientific Theories of Consciousness. Bonus Episode.
Dehaene & Naccache, "Towards a Cognitive Neuroscience..." (Website) | | WED, APR 15 |

UNIT III: COGNITION AND REPRESENTATION

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| 17. Thinking and Computation. Guest Lecture. Video on LMOD website.
Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" (Website) | | WED, APR 15 |
| 18. The Mind as Computer 1
Block, "Psychologism and Behaviorism" (Website) | | THU, APR 16 |
| | <i>Due: Paper 2</i> | TUE, APR 21 |
| 19. The Mind as Computer 2
Searle, "Can Computers Think?" (PM) | | WED, APR 22 |
| 20. The Representational Theory of Mind
Gallistel, "Psychology of Mental Representations" (Website)
<i>Secondary:</i> Fodor, "Propositional Attitudes" (PM) | | MON, APR 27 |
| 21. Folk Psychology and Eliminativism
Churchland, "Eliminative Materialism..." (PM)
<i>Secondary:</i> Dennett, "Three Kinds of Intentional Psychology" (Website) | <i>Announced: Paper 3</i> | WED, APR 29 |
| 22. Interpretationism
Dennett "True Believers" (PM) | | MON, MAY 4 |
| 23. Naturalistic Theories of Representation
Dretske, "A Recipe for Thought" (PM)
Millikin, "Biosemantics" (§§I-III, in PM) | | WED, MAY 6 |
| 24. The Singularity. Bonus Episode.
Chalmers, "The Singularity" (Website) | | FRI, MAY 8 (?) |
| | <i>Due: Paper 3</i> | TUE, MAY 12 |