

## PHIL250 Minds & Machines UBC 2019 Summer Term 1

### Instructors

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### Meetings

Mondays and Wednesdays, 1pm – 4pm  
Buchanan D204

### Office Hours

Monday & Wednesday 12pm-1pm Brock Hall Annex 158

### Overview

Some say the mind is a computer. If that's true, is it a metaphor or a claim we should take literally? Some think, too, the fact that the mind is a computer makes consciousness less mysterious, for the mind is just a computational machine. If the mind is a computer, does that mean that a sufficiently sophisticated computer could *think* and be conscious? Whether or not the mind is literally a computer, our minds process information they receive from our environments. In fact the environment often 'factors into' our cognitive processes — we use landmarks to find our way, and use physical objects to hold numbers in place of memory, for instance. Are these objects literally part of our cognitive processes, though? Do our minds extend into the world? Even if our minds don't literally extend into the world, the world influences the ways we think. We'll explore the ethical issues this creates when elements of our environment are designed to have harmful effects on us, such as the applications smartphones use. Though intelligent systems/AI are sometimes thought to be 'objective', and to avoid human biases, these technologies might inherit our biases through their training and implementation. We'll consider these issues by looking at the application of intelligent systems/AI technologies to criminal justice and welfare.

### Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, you will,

- Be able to engage with texts in a philosophically critical way, to express your thoughts clearly, in a way that mounts an argument, and to engage in philosophical discussion
- Be able to write a philosophy essay that identifies an argument, assesses that argument, and critically engages with that argument
- Know the main ideas of the recent and contemporary computational theory of the mind, and appreciate some of the philosophical challenges that arise from the idea of the mind as a thinking machine
- Understand the thesis of *physicalism about the mind*
- Understand the thesis of *the extended mind*
- Engage with current literature that looks at the addictive effects of personal technologies on their users
- Engage with current literature that claims the application of AI technologies in society perpetuates rather than alleviates systemic injustices

## Assessment

As well as assessing comprehension of and engagement with the course material, assessment for this course will aim to improve your philosophical toolkit.

### *Reading & Reflections (10%)*

You will be expected to be prepared for each class. Minimally, this requires doing the reading assigned for each class *before that class*.

To help motivate you here, we will ask you to complete a reflection on (each/a certain number) of class readings, to be submitted before the start of that class.

### *Writing Assignments (35%)*

The ability to write essays is a foundational skill for philosophers. Philosophical writing, though, is a little bit peculiar in its own way. Throughout this course, we'll spend some time working on and developing your writing abilities.

#### *Argument Extraction (x2, each worth 10% = 20%)*

- Summarize one of the class readings, extracting the/a main philosophical claim and explaining its significance (500 words/1 page).

#### *Critical Assessment (15%)*

- Philosophically evaluate the claim and argument for it, discussing whether you think the argument succeeds or not in motivating the claim, considering whether the claim might be better supported by another argument, or whether the claim itself is less significant than another claim in the vicinity (500 words/1 page).

### *In-Class Engagement (20%)*

Philosophy is an activity and we will be doing philosophy in class. You will be expected to participate in the in-class activity of doing philosophy. In-class participation can be as minimal as raising a question about the reading/topic of that class.

### *Final Research Project (35%)*

In addition to the writing assignments, you will have a final project to complete for this class. This project is to take a topic from the course, and philosophically explore and engage with it. For instance, you might wish to further explore the question of whether the brain is a computer; you might want to explore the ethics of some applied technology. Beyond this the project is open, as is the format for submission. You may submit a written essay, recorded podcast, piece of (performance) art, non-essay literature, etc.

You must come to discuss your projects with us prior to submission.

## Attendance & Participation

The best way to learn philosophy is to do it, and as you've just seen, doing the readings and engaging in class together count for a substantial portion of your final grade. Consider this our way of encouraging you to attend and to engage with your classmates. You will receive credit for the participation component of the assessment with your engagement each meeting, and as such it is important that you attend every meeting.

## Classroom Policy

The study of philosophy can be personally affecting, as many questions in philosophy relate directly to issues people may have experienced throughout in their personal lives. As such, it

is especially important to respect the diversity of opinions and perspectives you will encounter in this course, both of those philosophers we read and of your fellow students. You will encounter many viewpoints during this course, some of which may be quite unfamiliar and even unpleasant to you. Studying philosophy involves a willingness to foreground values different from those you yourself may hold, and to engage with questions you may not have thought to ask. Just as much, you will find that your own perspective brings something to the topics we'll explore. We won't shy away from critically engaging with difficult questions, but remember that critical engagement is not an invitation to be unpleasant. Philosophy is a discursive discipline, and the best discussions take place in a comfortable, friendly atmosphere that allows for everyone's voice to be heard.

## Topics & Readings

### *Computationalism*

May 6

Hilary Putnam, "The Nature of Mental States"

May 8

John Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs"

### *Supplementary readings:*

Andy Clark, *Mindware*, Ch.1

Jaegwon Kim, *Philosophy of Mind*, Ch.5 \*\*\*

### *Physicalism*

May 13

Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?"

Frank Jackson, "What Mary Didn't Know"

May 15

**\*\*DUE: Argument Extraction 1\*\***

David Chalmers, "Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness"

<http://consc.net/papers/facing.html>

Patricia S. Churchland, "The Hornswoggle Problem"

May 20

Victoria Day, NO CLASS

### *Emotion*

May 22

Martha Nussbaum, "Emotions as Judgments of Value and Importance"

**\*\*Due Argument Extraction\*\* March 24<sup>th</sup>**

May 27

Jesse Prinz, "Embodied Emotions"

### *The extended mind hypothesis*

May 29

Andy Clark & David Chalmers, "The Extended Mind"

**\*\*Due Critical Assessment\*\* March 31<sup>st</sup>**

June 3 & 5 Midterm Break, NO CLASS

*Addiction*

*June 10*

Nick Heather, "On Defining Addiction"

*June 12*

TBA

*AI Ethics*

*June 17*

Gabrielle M Johnson, "Algorithmic Bias: on the implicit bias of social technology"

*June 19*

Virginia Eubanks, "Automating Inequality: the digital poorhouse" Chapter 5

**Accessibility**

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 Access & Diversity. A&D will determine that student's eligibility for accommodations in accordance with Policy 73: 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 Access and Diversity should the accommodations affect the essential learning outcomes of a course.

**Academic Conduct & Plagiarism**

It is your responsibility to understand UBC's rules regarding plagiarism. Plagiarism is intellectual theft. It occurs when an individual presents another person's work as their own. Proper scholarship involves examining and referring to other people's work, but when do you use other people's work you must acknowledge it as theirs and attribute it to them through some method of proper academic citation. Failure to properly attribute people their work constitutes plagiarism, as you are then passing their work off as your own. Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. Minor infractions will result in the plagiarized work receiving a zero. Serious infractions may result in failing the course.

**Academic Citation**

There is no required citation method for this course. Please feel free to use whichever method you are most comfortable with. Here is UBC's guide on citation <http://help.library.ubc.ca/evaluating-and-citing-sources/how-to-cite/>