

## PHIL 1640– PHILOSOPHY OF PSYCHOLOGY

**Instructor:** Alessandra Buccella – alb319@pitt.edu

**Meetings:** Wednesdays, 6.00 – 8.30 PM, Room: CL 304.

**Office hours:** Wed. 5-6 PM, Fri. 2-3 PM; CL 1009B

### **Course description:**

How does the mind work? So-called ‘computationalists’ think that the mind (and the brain) works as a *computer*, which first forms and manipulates *symbols* (usually called ‘mental representations’) according to *rules*, and then issues ‘commands’ to guide behavior. On the other hand, the ‘5E’ (Ecological, Embodied, Embedded, Enactive, Extended) approach rejects the computer analogy. 5E theorists insist that minds, and minded organisms more generally, cannot be understood in isolation from their *environment*. Cognition doesn’t happen ‘in a vacuum’, and it isn’t separable from *action*. As a consequence, the mind can extend beyond the boundaries of our skull and even of our whole body. This course is devoted to comparing and contrasting the computationalist and the 5E approaches to cognition. We will examine similarities and differences, assumptions and commitments with respect to core debates at the interface of philosophy, psychology, and cognitive science such as, for instance, the nature of visual perception.

### **At the end of this course, you will be able to:**

- Articulate the main claims and implications of different views of perception and cognition, both historical and contemporary;
- Reconstruct different theoretical approaches to the mind adopting a ‘big picture’ perspective;
- Understand the historical backgrounds of contemporary psychology and cognitive science;
- Discuss and evaluate “empirically-informed” philosophical theories;

### **Readings:**

All the required readings are on the Blackboard page of the course. You are responsible for downloading/printing them and reading them carefully before each class.

### **What you need to do to succeed in this course:**

- Do the readings. It isn’t a lot of material, so I expect you to read it carefully and come to class prepared.
- Come to class, be on time, don’t leave early unless it is an emergency. If you must miss a portion of a class for a non-emergency, please notify me in advance.

- Actively contribute to the discussions. This can be done in many ways; you don't have to raise your hand and speak if you don't feel comfortable doing it.
- Complete the assignments on time (for my extension policy, see below).
- Respect the teacher and your classmates. Hateful or discriminatory speech/behavior will NOT be tolerated.

### **Assignments and grading:**

Attendance: 10%

Discussion questions: 15%

Presentation: 20%

Midterm: 25%

Final essay: 30%

### **Presentations:**

Each week, a group of 2-3 students gives a short presentation (15-20 minutes) on the reading assignment. Presentations must include either a PowerPoint or a printed handout. Presenting at least once is mandatory and counts towards 20% of the final grade. Needless to say: if you need help, come to my office hours!

### **Discussion questions:**

You are required to come to class with a discussion question ready to share with the group. This must be well-articulated, and it must touch on something you found particularly convincing or unconvincing in the reading (mere clarificatory questions don't count!). Be prepared to expand on your question and explain/defend your position.

The week you are presenting, you are exempted from bringing a discussion question.

If your discussion question isn't shared in class, you must write it down and give it/email it to me by the end of the day.

### **Extensions and late assignment policy:**

- I grant extensions only in well-documented exceptional circumstances.
- If you hand in your assignment late and you didn't ask for an extension, your grade will be docked 1/3 a letter grade (i.e. A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) per day (including weekends and holidays).

### **Religious Commitments**

If you think your religious commitments may impact your course work, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can discuss the best strategy for accommodating your needs.

### **Cheating and Plagiarism:**

Cheating/plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students suspected of violating the University of Pittsburgh Policy on Academic Integrity, noted below, will be required to participate in the outlined procedural process as initiated by the instructor. A minimum sanction of a zero score for the quiz, exam or paper will be imposed. (For the full Academic Integrity policy, go to [www.provost.pitt.edu/info/ail.html](http://www.provost.pitt.edu/info/ail.html).)

### **Disabilities and different styles of learning:**

Please don't hesitate to let me know (privately or publicly, that's up to you) the learning style that best suits you: I will do my best to accommodate you.

If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, you need to notify both me and Disability Resources and Services no later than the second week of term. You may be asked to provide documentation of your disability to determine the appropriateness of accommodations. To notify Disability Resources and Services, call (412) 648-7890 to schedule an appointment. The Office is located in 140 William Pitt Union.

### **Communications:**

You are expected to read e-mail sent to your University account (username@pitt.edu) on a regular basis. This includes checking the Blackboard page for the course.

### **Technology:**

Laptops, tablets, or smartphones are allowed, but only to complete in-class assignments following the instructor's directions.

### **Paper drafts:**

I will be happy to look at drafts of the final essay before the due date, but I have some conditions:

1. You *must* come to office hours (or make an appointment). *Don't email me the drafts*, I won't look at them outside of office hours.
2. Prepare in advance the specific questions you have for me.
3. The draft you ask me to look at must be your *best work*: there's little point in giving feedback on scattered notes.

## **SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS**

### **Meeting 1 – The ‘orthodoxy’**

Wed. 01/15: Z. Pylyshyn, “What is Cognitive Science?”

### **Meeting 2 – Cartesian and non-Cartesian views of the Mind**

Wed. 01/22: M. Rowlands, *The New Science of the Mind*, ch.2.

**Meeting 3 – Against the orthodoxy**

Wed. 01/29: H. Dreyfus, “The Psychological Assumption”.

**Meeting 4 – A different story**

Wed. 02/05: “Gestalt Psychology”, in Käufer & Chemero, *Phenomenology: an Introduction*.  
J. Dewey, “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology”.

**Meeting 5 – A different story (continued)**

Wed. 02/12: “James J. Gibson and Ecological Psychology”, in Käufer & Chemero, *Phenomenology: an Introduction*.

**Meeting 6 – The Phenomenological approach**

Wed. 02/19: M. Merleau-Ponty, “The Primacy of Perception”.

**Meeting 7 – Mid-term exam**

Wed. 02/26: In-class essay.

**Meeting 8 – Perception, Representation, Veridicality**

Wed. 03/04: D. Hoffman & M. Singh, “Computational Evolutionary Perception”.  
J. Cohen, “Perceptual Representation, Veridicality, and the Interface Theory of Perception”.

**\*\* Wed. 03/11: NO CLASS (Spring Break) \*\***

**Meeting 9 – Predictive Processing**

Wed. 03/18: Z. Drayson, “Direct Perception and the Predictive Mind”.

**Meeting 10 – Bayesianism and Computation**

Wed. 03/25: M. Chirimuuta, “Vision”, in Sprevak & Colombo (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Computational Mind*.

**Meeting 11 – What counts as ‘cognition’?**

Wed. 04/01: A. Clark & D. Chalmers, “The Extended Mind”.

**Meeting 12 – What counts as ‘cognition’? (continued)**

Wed. 04/08: Z. Drayson & A. Clark, “Cognitive Disability and Embodied, Extended Minds”.

**Meeting 13 – Is ‘holism’ the answer?**

Wed. 04/15: C. A. Skarda, “The Perceptual Form of Life” + Discussion about final paper.

**\*\* Final paper due: Saturday, 04/25, 11.59 PM \*\***