

PHIL 296-01 – PHILOSOPHY OF PSYCHOLOGY

In-person only

Instructor: Dr. Alessandra Buccella (abuccella@wesleyan.edu; +1 412-8774806)

Meeting with me: on Zoom or on the phone, by appointment. Don't be shy about asking me for an appointment of just reaching out spontaneously: I am here for you!

Meetings: Tue./Thu. 2.50 – 4.10 PM, CFA theater (THEA)

Course description:

How does the mind work? So-called 'computationalists' think that the mind (and the brain) works like 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 Moodle 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 class, one (or occasionally two) student 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! You can sign up for a presentation spot on Moodle.

Discussion questions:

On Moodle, you'll see a Forum called "Discussion Questions". **Every week** (except for the week when your presentation is scheduled), you **MUST** post **one new question** in the forum **AND answer another question** of your choice among those posted by other students.

There is no specific day in which you should do all this, but I will check the forum at the end of each week to keep track of progress and possibly provide further clarifications.

You can also contribute more than one question and/or answer per week, but **only 1 question and 1 answer per week are mandatory** and will count towards your grade.

Finally, your weekly question **must** be about one of the readings for that week (or something I say in class), but your answer can be to questions from previous weeks.

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 and/or plagiarism will not be tolerated, as they are violations of the Honor Code that, as a student at Wesleyan, you have agreed to follow and respect. Please refer to the corresponding section in the Student Handbook for more information.

Disabilities and different styles of learning:

Students with disabilities who would like to request ADA/504 reasonable accommodations are expected to self-disclose to Accessibility Services and meet with a staff member in the office. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the student's disability in the context of their academic and nonacademic plans, to review documentation of the disability and, at their request, to assist with arranging appropriate accommodations with instructors and other University offices as needed.

For more information, please visit wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/disabilities or contact the office at accessibility@wesleyan.edu to make an appointment. Students who have, or suspect they may have, a disability for which they would like to request reasonable accommodations, can contact Accessibility Services at any time to discuss their needs.

Miscellaneous:

Communications: You are expected to read e-mails sent your University account (username@wesleyan.edu) on a regular basis. This includes checking the Moodle page for the course.

Technology: Laptops, tablets, or smartphones are allowed, but *only* when specified by the instructor.

Paper feedback: I will be happy to look at your final projects *once* before the due date, but I have some conditions:

1. You *must* make an appointment to talk with me.
2. Prepare in advance the specific questions you have for me: that will save us both some time.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

Week 1 (ONLINE) – Introduction: Minds and Brains

09/01: D. Chalmers, “The puzzle of conscious experience”.

09/03: A. Clark, “I am John’s brain”.

Week 2 – The ‘orthodoxy’

09/08: Z. Pylyshyn, “What is Cognitive Science?”

09/10: Pylyshyn continued...

Optional: D. Marr, *Vision*, ch.1.

Week 3 – Cartesian and non-Cartesian views of the Mind

09/15: M. Rowlands, *The New Science of the Mind*, ch.2.

09/17: H. Dreyfus, “The Psychological Assumption”.

Week 4 – A different story

09/22: “Gestalt Psychology”, in Käufer & Chemero, *Phenomenology: an Introduction*.

09/24: J. Dewey, “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology”.

Week 5 – A different story (continued)

09/29: “James J. Gibson and Ecological Psychology”, in Käufer & Chemero, *Phenomenology: an Introduction*.

10/01: M. Merleau-Ponty, “The Primacy of Perception”.

Week 6 – Midterm

10/06: Pre-midterm review

10/08: In-class midterm.

Week 7 – Perception, Representation, Veridicality

10/13: D. Hoffman & M. Singh, “Computational Evolutionary Perception”.

10/15: J. Cohen, “Perceptual Representation, Veridicality, and the Interface Theory of Perception.”

Optional: D. Hoffman et al., “Probing the interface theory of perception”.

Week 8 – Bayesian and predictive approaches

10/20: Z. Drayson, “Direct Perception and the Predictive Mind”.

10/22: M. Chirimuuta, “Vision”, in Sprevak & Colombo (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Computational Mind*.

Week 9 – Sensori-motor cognition

10/27: V. Gallese & G. Lakoff, “The brain’s concepts: the role of the sensorimotor system in conceptual knowledge”.

10/29: M. Jeannerod, “Neural Simulation of Action: A Unifying Mechanism for Motor Cognition”.

Week 10 – Sensori-motor cognition (continued)

11/03: *NO CLASS (Election day)*

11/05: A. Chemero, “Sensorimotor empathy”.

Week 11 – The ‘Dynamic’ brain

11/10: T. Van Gelder, “What might cognition be, if not computation?”

11/12: M. Chirimuuta, “Charting the Heraclitean Brain”.

Week 12 – The Extended mind

11/17: A. Clark & D. Chalmers, “The Extended Mind”.

11/19: Z. Drayson & A. Clark, “Cognitive Disability and Embodied, Extended Minds”.

Weeks 13-14 – is Holism the answer?

12/01: C. A. Skarda, “The Perceptual Form of Life” (the meeting will be ONLINE).

12/03: Make up / wrap up (ONLINE).

Final papers due: 12/11, 11.59 PM