

Philosophy 329: Minds, machines, and persons

Spring 2023

Tue & Thu 2-3:20pm, Campbell Hall A1

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Office hours: Tue & Thu 4-5pm and by appointment (office: Philosophy Department, 106 Somerset Avenue, 5th floor, Office 534)

Course description

What are minds? What are (Turing) machines? What can minds and machines do, and how? The course is structured along these questions. We will explore theoretical material on the nature of the mental and the computational ('computer' understood roughly in terms of what a Turing machine is), as well as questions on the relation between the two and, finally, questions of further, practical relevance, especially given the rise of technologies such as V.R. and A.I.

Learning goals

- To develop an understanding of
 - some major views on the nature of the mind,
 - the nature of computers/computing,
 - and of some of the capacities minds/machines display.
- To develop the ability to critically read and respond to philosophical material, which is to say, to detect the theses and arguments proposed by the authors and form our own, too.

Course requirements

Discussion board: 10%

We'll supplement in-class discussion with the Canvas discussion board. A topic for discussion will be posted approximately each Monday, and you'll be required to contribute one comment (min. one sentence; max, one paragraph) by Sunday evening at the latest.

Presentations: 15% each

- *Reading presentation.* Each class will begin with a short (~15 min) presentation by one student (or group of students, depending on class size) of

the reading material. The presentation, meant to jumpstart the class, should focus on identifying the main thesis of the reading, as expressed in as few sentences as possible, and the author's main arguments to support that thesis; plus at least 3 questions and/or objections prompted by the reading. These should be presented in a short document/handout. The presenter will be challenged, at the end of the presentation, to name a random number in the range of the class roster and to respond to the question/objection/comment that the corresponding member of class will put to them, meaning that everyone should bring such a question, etc. prepared to class. (Note: This presentation is graded as completed/not completed.)

- *Culture presentation.* During the second half of the course, each class will end with a short (~15 min) presentation by one student (or group of students, depending on class size) featuring a piece of culture/popular media (film, tv, news, etc.) that seems to assume or endorse a philosophical view relating to a topic discussed in class. The task is to identify that view, offer an argument for it (your own or reconstructed) and, if possible, evaluate it. Visual aids and/or handouts summarising the result of that task are required. (Examples: Does David Foster Wallace's 'Consider the lobster' endorse a form of behaviourism? Does Disney's *Wall-E* assume functionalism? What view of mindedness might the view that A.I. poses an existential threat take?)

Midterm paper: 30%

The midterm paper is an exercise in argument reconstruction. Our topic will be Searle's reply to the 'brain simulator' objection to the Chinese room argument. The paper consists of three parts:

1. Explain the 'brain simulator' objection.
2. Reconstruct Searle's reply in the form of an argument (numbered premises and conclusion).
3. Explain the argument in your own words and offer an evaluation: is it valid/sound? Are there any unacknowledged/assumed premises that need stating?

Final project: 30%

- Option A: A ~2,500-word paper arguing for a (positive or negative) thesis on your topic of choice.
Or:
- Option B: A piece of philosophical but non-academic work (literary essay, podcast, short film, short story) that recognisably addresses a question related to the course material and defends an answer to it. If you choose this option, you've got to attach a short document with an argument defending that answer. If the project is audiovisual, it mustn't be longer than 10 min.

Extensions:

In case of extraordinary circumstances such as illness or family issues, extensions will be granted if requested 2-3 days before the due date.

Late submissions:

Late submissions of midterm and final assignments are accepted with a penalty of 1 point per late day.

What's expected?

Although presentations, written work and other formats all vary, when you're presenting a thesis and an argument for it, it is important that the thesis be clear and that the argument adequately support it. What 'clarity' and 'adequacy' amount to we will see throughout the course, but a useful rubric is this one, from the Rutgers Arts and Humanities Core Curriculum goals:

GOAL AHo - Student is able to... Examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production.			
OUTSTANDING	GOOD	SATISFACTORY	UNSATISFACTORY
Engages in sophisticated critical examination of philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production central to the course. Critically analyzes these philosophical or other theoretical issues and assesses the relative merits of each .	Engages in critical reading of philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production relevant to the course. Constructs persuasive arguments about these philosophical or other theoretical issues.	Satisfactorily describes philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production through reliance on course materials. Draws some critical conclusions about these philosophical or other theoretical issues.	Fails to identify or engage philosophical or other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production. Fails to analyze or critique philosophical or theoretical issues; makes unsubstantiated assertions or substitutes opinion for analysis.

A note on grades:

A weird fact about Rutgers: there are no '–' grades! The standard conversions from a 100-point scale are:

$$100 \geq A \geq 90 > B+ \geq 85 > B \geq 80 > C+ \geq 75 > C \geq 70 > D \geq 60 > F \geq 0$$

Course schedule (subject to change)

1. 17 January Introduction
2. 19 January What's at stake?
Listening: A skeptical take on the A.I. Revolution. *The Ezra Klein Show*
Reading: Borges, J. L. The circular ruins

Minds

3. 24 January Rationalism
Reading: Descartes, R. Meditation I

4. 26 January Rationalism
Reading: Descartes, R. Meditation VI; Mercer, C. Descartes' debt to Teresa of Ávila
5. 29 January Behaviourism
Reading: Descartes, R. Meditation VI (recap)
6. 2 February Behaviourism
Reading: Ryle, G. Descartes' myth
7. 7 February Functionalism
Reading: Putnam, H. The nature of mental states
8. 9 February Functionalism
Reading: Lewis, D. Psychological and Theoretical Identification
9. 14 February Functionalism
Reading: Block, N. Troubles with functionalism
10. 16 February Mental representation
Reading: Crane, T. *The mechanical mind*, Ch. 1
11. 21 February Mental representation
Reading: Fodor, J. *Psychosemantics*, Ch. 1
12. 23 February Writing workshop

Machines

13. 28 February Can computers think?
Reading: Searle, J. Minds, brains and programs
14. 2 March Can computers think?
Reading: Crane, T. *The Mechanical Mind*, Ch. 3
15. 7 March Can computers think?
Reading: Crane, T. *The Mechanical Mind*, Ch. 4

Assignment due: midterm paper

16. 9 March Can computers think?
Reading: Turing, A. Computing Machinery and Intelligence

17. 21 March Can computers think?
Reading: Mandelbaum, E. Everything and More: The Prospects of Whole Brain Emulation
18. 23 March Consciousness
Reading: Crane, T. *The Mechanical Mind*, Ch. 6
19. 28 March Consciousness
Reading: Chalmers, D. *The conscious mind*, Ch. 7
- What can they do?*
20. 30 March Experiencing
Reading: Lewis, D. What experience teaches
21. 4 April Acting
Reading: Pavese, C. Practical senses
22. 6 April Valuing
Reading: Paul, L. Value by acquaintance
23. 11 April Intuiting
Reading: Rayo, A. *On the brink of paradox*, Ch. 10
24. 13 April Intuiting
Reading: Rayo, A. *On the brink of paradox*, Ch. 10
25. 18 April Feeling
Reading: Damasio, A. Feelings of emotion and the self
26. 20 April Detaching
Reading: Chalmers, D. Uploading: A Philosophical Analysis
27. 25 April Detaching
Reading: Thomson, E. *Précis of Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy*
28. 27 April Detaching
Listening: How Real is Virtual Reality? with David Chalmers. *Artificial Intelligence & Equality* podcast

Assignment due: final paper/project

Other business

Technology requirements

Readings, details of assignments, and forums will all be on Canvas. You just need internet access. (Please visit the [Rutgers Student Tech Guide](#) page for resources available to all students. If you do not have the appropriate technology for financial reasons, please email Dean of Students deanofstudents@echo.rutgers.edu for assistance. If you are facing other financial hardships, please visit the Office of Financial Aid at <https://financialaid.rutgers.edu/>.)

Academic integrity policy

You will need to sign the Rutgers Honor Pledge on every major assignment as follows: ‘On my honor, I have neither received nor given any unauthorized assistance on this assignment.’

Rutgers University takes academic dishonesty very seriously. By enrolling in this course, you assume responsibility for familiarizing yourself with the Academic Integrity Policy and the possible penalties (including suspension and expulsion) for violating the policy. As per the policy, all suspected violations will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct. Academic dishonesty includes (but is not limited to):

- Cheating
- Plagiarism
- Aiding others in committing a violation or allowing others to use your work
- Failure to cite sources correctly
- Fabrication
- Using another person’s ideas or words without attribution—re-using a previous assignment
- Unauthorized collaboration
- Sabotaging another student’s work

If in doubt, please consult the instructor. Please review the [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

Self-reporting absence application

If you are experiencing symptoms of any transmittable disease, remain at home. Site for self-reporting absence application is here: <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/>

Student-wellness services

Report a Bias Incident

If you experience or witness an act of bias or hate, report it to someone in authority. You may file a report online and you will be contacted within 24 hours. The bias reporting page is [here](#). [Click here to report a bias incident](#)

Bias is defined by the University as an act, verbal, written, physical, psychological, that threatens, or harms a person or group on the basis of race, religion, color, sex, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, ancestry, disability, marital status, civil union status, domestic partnership status, atypical heredity or cellular blood trait, military service or veteran status.

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS)

(848) 932-7884 / 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901/

<http://health.rutgers.edu/medical-counseling-services/counseling/>

CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professionals within Rutgers Health services to support students' efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community, and consultation and collaboration with campus partners.

Crisis Intervention

<http://health.rutgers.edu/medical-counseling-services/counseling/crisis-intervention/>

Report a Concern

<http://health.rutgers.edu/do-something-to-help/>

Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance (VPVA)

(848) 932-1181 / 3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 /

www.vpva.rutgers.edu/

The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking to students, staff and faculty. To reach staff during office hours when the university is open or to reach an advocate after hours, call 848-932-1181.

Disability Services

(848) 445-6800 / Lucy Stone Hall, Suite A145, Livingston Campus, 54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Piscataway, NJ 08854 / <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation:

<https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines.>

If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.