

SPM 179: Minds, Machines, and Morals

Spring 2018

Lectures: Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:00–10:50pm, Keiper 204

Labs: Thursdays, 2:15–3:35, Kaufman 202

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Office Hours: Tuesdays from 10:15am–11:15am & Wednesdays from 3:00pm–5:30pm

Course Description

This course provides an introduction to the central problems, concepts, and methods of cognitive science and moral psychology. We will analyze questions addressing the nature of intelligence, the relationship between minds and bodies, and the basis of moral beliefs and behaviors. These explorations will bridge the sciences and humanities by taking a fundamentally interdisciplinary perspective.

Course Objectives

By the end of the semester (provided regular attendance, active participation in class discussions, assiduous completion of all assignments, and adherence to all other class policies), you will attain and cultivate the skills needed to achieve the following objectives:

- Gain an understanding of the separations and connections between psychology and philosophy.
- Gain an appreciation of foundational ideas and questions in cognitive science and moral psychology.
- Gain tools and resources for thinking critically about conflicting philosophical and scientific theories.
- Gain familiarity with basic tenets of experimental design (e.g., hypothesis testing, operationalization).
- Gain experience writing interdisciplinary papers that incorporate argument and evidence.

Course Requirements and Grading

You will be assessed by your performance on the following assignments, detailed below (1,000 points total):

| Thoughtful Participation | Weekly Worksheets | Reading Reflections | Midterm Paper | Final Paper |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| 150 pts. | 300 pts. total | 15 pts. each (x 10) | 150 pts. | 250 pts. |

Letter grades will be assigned as follows (decimals will be rounded to the nearest whole number):

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| A 93–100 | A- 90–92 | B+ 87–89 | B 83–86 | B- 80–82 | C+ 77–79 |
| C 73–76 | C- 70–72 | D+ 67–69 | D 63–66 | D- 60–62 | F 0–59 |

Important Dates

| January 23 | January 30 | February 13 | March 23 | April 16 | May 5 |
|-------------------------|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Last day to add classes | Last day to drop classes without record | Last day to elect P/NP option | Midterm paper due | Last day to withdraw (with record) | Final paper due |

Thoughtful Participation

The success of this course depends heavily on your contributions to our class discussions. Also, as research has convincingly shown¹, you will learn more effectively by actively participating in these discussions. You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss all of the readings critically and creatively, by making intelligent claims, raising objections, and asking thought-provoking questions that range from specific critiques of a particular methodology to big-picture applications of a body of findings. To give everybody an equal opportunity to receive full credit, I may sometimes refrain from calling on frequent participators. I will also frequently call on students randomly, but I will provide you time to prepare for this (e.g., by pair sharing). Side conversations during class are strongly discouraged and will result in penalties on your participation grade. Please respect a diversity of opinions and questions, and aim to contribute constructively and considerately.

You are expected to bring all assigned readings with you, and it will often be helpful to bring relevant readings from previous classes, as well as any notes you have taken. Because consistent attendance is necessary for you to have the opportunity to participate in class, absences will negatively impact your participation grade.

Your participation grade will primarily reflect the quality – rather than quantity – of your in-class comments, including how well you respond to classmates and actively encourage their participation. An excellent grade will be earned by reliably participating in thoughtful ways that reveal intellectual acuity and a deep engagement with the material; by always displaying excellent preparation, having thought critically about all assigned readings and formulated discussion questions before class; by respectfully listening to others and generously responding to their contributions, thus approaching discussion as a collaborative activity; and by making sophisticated connections that consistently elevate the level of discussion.

Weekly Worksheets

Each week, you will be asked to complete a short assignment related to the topic of the readings and/or involving philosophical or psychological methodology. The length, due date, and required time to complete each worksheet will be variable, and this variation will be reflected in the number of points that each worksheet is worth. Some worksheets will involve group work, while others will be completed independently, and two worksheets will require attendance at outside events (Common Hour on January 25 and the Psychology Research Symposium on the night of April 24). Details about each worksheet will be announced during class.

Reading Reflections

At the beginning of class each Monday, you will be required to write a *short* reflection on the assigned readings. Each of these reflections will be worth 15 points. You cannot make these up, so you will forfeit your points by being late or absent. If you have taken notes on the readings in advance, you are welcome to use these as a resource. Your highest 10 responses will be counted toward your grade; you may therefore replace your two lowest scores (or take up to three “free passes” for excused/unexcused absences).

Possible content includes raising questions about particularly confusing aspects of the readings, remarking on applications to your life or the lives of others, noting contradictions or agreements between different readings, suggesting potential follow-up research, or critiquing methods or conclusions in the readings. Because these reflections are brief, it is crucial that you do not include irrelevant details and that you do not merely summarize. These reflections will serve two purposes: allowing me to ensure that you have completed the assigned readings, and allowing you to reflect on and critically interrogate the material before beginning discussion. If it becomes clear that a substantial proportion of the class has not been suitably engaging with the assigned readings before class, I reserve the right to make these more extensive take-home assignments.

I will not provide extensive written feedback on these reflections, but I am very happy to discuss your grades or strategies for improvement at any time. I encourage you to take advantage of this by visiting me in my office.

¹ See, e.g., Howard, J. R. (2015). *Discussion in the college classroom*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Midterm Paper

Imagine that you are a lawyer in an unusual and groundbreaking trial. An alien creature has recently appeared on Earth, and it is currently being held in captivity. Many people are concerned that the alien is dangerous, and they are clamoring for it to be destroyed. Others are unconvinced that the alien poses an immediate threat, and they believe that it should be allowed to live. In the heat of this growing public unrest, a case has been brought to court to settle the issue. The plaintiff must argue that the alien deserves no legal rights, and should be put to death. The defense lawyer must argue that the alien deserves to be dignified with legal rights and therefore should be granted freedom and a right to life. To a large degree, the case rests on whether the alien can be shown to possess a sufficiently complex mind – the most important prerequisite for having legal rights.

For this assignment, your task is to put yourself in the shoes of one of the two attorneys and write an opening statement. You may choose to assume the role of either the defense or the plaintiff, thus strongly advocating either for or against the alien's right to life on the basis of possessing sufficient mental abilities (which could include capacities for reason, communication, general intelligence, emotional experience, etc.). Your paper should therefore be focused on determining the degree to which the alien can be said to have a complex mind.

Be as creative as you'd like in generating the arguments and evidence that you bring to bear for the demonstration of mental abilities in the alien. You are welcome to imagine that you've been able to run every experiment possible to helpfully illuminate the alien's capabilities (or lack thereof). If you take the role of the plaintiff, you should anticipate (and counter) some of the possible objections of the defense. If you take the role of the defense, you should similarly anticipate and counter plausible arguments and evidence from the plaintiff's side. These considerations of counterarguments should comprise at least one-quarter of your paper.

A particularly excellent paper will present a delightfully insightful argument that thoroughly responds to the prompt by synthesizing material from a range of assigned readings and class discussions. It will maintain a clear thesis throughout and will demonstrate a strong grasp of the topic at hand, without misconceptions. Finally, it will be interdisciplinary, combining philosophical and psychological approaches in appropriate ways.

This paper should be 1,500 words (± 250 words) in length and should be uploaded to Canvas by 11:59pm on Friday, March 23. You should include only your F&M ID number for identification.

Final Paper

For your final paper, you should *substantially* revise and enhance your midterm paper. This revision process should involve (1) carefully addressing comments that you received on the midterm paper and (2) expanding your discussion of the alien's deservingness of moral rights by incorporating new material assigned during the second half of the semester. In addition, you should add a new ending to your statement in which you inform the judge about aspects of moral psychology that have the potential to cloud her decision, thus imploring her to confront and overcome tendencies toward certain evaluations that she may be inclined to make.

This paper should be 2,000 words (± 250 words) in length and should be uploaded to Canvas by 11:59pm on Saturday, May 5. You should include only your F&M ID number for identification.

Opportunities for Extra Credit

You may earn up to 15 extra credit points during the semester (before 4/27) through any combination of the below. Additional bonus opportunities may also arise, providing the potential to earn even more extra credit.

- Each time you send me (via email) a paragraph-length description of a relevant talk that you attended (e.g., Common Hour, or a talk sponsored by PSY or PHI), you will earn 2 extra credit points.
- Each time you send me (via email) a paragraph-length description of a relevant news article, television show (e.g., *Westworld* or *Black Mirror*), or movie (e.g., *The Imitation Game* or *Ex Machina*), accompanied by a paragraph detailing the connections to class content, you will earn 1 extra credit point.
- Each time you visit the Writing Center for help on an assignment, you will earn 1 extra credit point.

Course Policies

Academic Integrity

I take academic honesty very seriously. You risk severe consequences by committing acts of plagiarism (i.e., representing someone else's work as your own), cheating, falsification, impersonating, or other similar offenses, including facilitating another student in committing an act of academic dishonesty. Penalties for these offenses will be carefully assessed on a case-by-case basis, and may include receiving a failing grade in the course or expulsion from F&M. Please refer to the Franklin & Marshall College Catalog for additional details.

Appealing Grades

If you receive a grade that is inconsistent with what you believe you should have earned, you have a week to set up an appointment with me to appeal your grade. When scheduling this appointment, you must submit a written statement explaining your case. After one week has passed, all grades will be considered final.

Policy on Late Assignments

You will lose 5% of your grade on an assignment for every day it is late. However, you have one "free gift" that you can use at any time: the opportunity to take a 24-hour extension on any assignment without penalty. In extreme cases when unexpected and unavoidable circumstances prevent you from completing an assignment on time, please inform me as soon as possible and I will use my discretion to determine whether to waive or attenuate the late penalty.

Policy on Electronic Devices

In order to maximize your success and minimize the possibility for distractions, you may not use ANY electronic devices during class unless indicated otherwise. (On some Thursdays, you may be asked to bring a laptop for class activities.) Research has indicated this will be likely to enhance your learning.² Exceptions will be granted for students with compelling reasons for using a laptop or other device to take notes (if this is the case, please speak with me privately at the beginning of the semester).

Academic Accommodations

Academic accommodations are available for students who require them. Please schedule an appointment with me immediately to discuss any accommodations for this course that have been supported by appropriate documentation and approved by the Office of Disability Services. I will keep all information confidential.

Communication

I will generally respond to emails within 24 hours. I will also be available to meet during my office hours, by appointment, and anytime when my door is open. I strongly encourage you to take advantage of this, particularly in cases when you need further clarity on an assignment or when course material has made you uncomfortable in any way. While mild discomfort is often a positive indication of personal and intellectual growth, please come speak to me immediately if you experience (or anticipate experiencing) any form of distress. If any issues arise that have the potential to interfere with your success in the course, please be in touch with me as soon as possible. I value open communication, and I invite you to be frank with me.

Tips for Success

This class will be intensive. You will be expected to consistently keep up with all of the readings and to assimilate and synthesize a lot of difficult material. This will often require spreading readings across several days preceding each week and re-reading some material after classes. I am here to help you succeed, and I urge you to come talk to me about concerns or confusions regarding the course material and assignments. Your fellow students can also be great resources; reaching out to them can be a fun and collaborative way to learn. In particular, swapping paper drafts with your classmates to receive informal peer evaluations is an acceptable and encouraged practice to improve your writing. Additionally, please feel free to take advantage of the many other resources that F&M has to offer! For example, the Writing Center (located on the second level of Diagnothian Hall) can assist you with writing and other academic skills. If English is not your primary language, you may want to avail yourself of ESOL tutoring by making an appointment via fandmes.simplybook.me. Finally, Counseling Services (located in the LGH Wellness Center in College Square) can provide support for your wellbeing and offers up to eight free sessions each year. If any issues arise that have the potential to interfere with your success in the course, please be in touch as soon as possible.

² See, e.g., Mueller, P.A., & Oppenheimer, D.M. (2014). The pen is mightier than the keyboard: Advantages of longhand over laptop note taking. *Psychological Science*, 25(6), 1159–1168; Sana, F., Weston, T., & Cepeda, N.J. (2013). Laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers. *Computers & Education*, 62, 24–31.

Semester Schedule

*Components of this schedule are subject to change; please check Canvas regularly for updates.
Please bring hard copies of all required readings to class with you each day.*

| Week # | Topic | Reading Assignments (to be completed by the beginning of each week) |
|--|---|--|
| Part 1: Introduction to Cognitive Science | | |
| Week 1 (1/17, 1/18) | Mental illusions | Course syllabus. |
| Week 2 (1/22, 1/24, 1/25) | Perceiving other minds | Dennett, D. C. (1996). <i>Kinds of minds</i> (pp. 1–37). New York: BasicBooks. Waytz, A., Epley, N., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2010). Social cognition unbound: Insights into anthropomorphism and dehumanization. <i>Current Directions in Psychological Science</i> , 19(1), 58–62. |
| Week 3 (1/29, 1/31, 2/1) | The intelligence of machinery | Radio Lab. (2011, May 31). <i>Talking to machines</i> . [http://bit.ly/1xM9OOf] Pinker, S. (1997). <i>How the mind works</i> (pp. 59–79). New York: Norton. |
| Week 4 (2/5, 2/7, 2/8) | Could computers really think? | Searle, J. R. (1990). Is the brain's mind a computer program? <i>Scientific American</i> , 262(1), 26–31. Churchland, P. M., & Churchland, P. S. (1990). Could a machine think? <i>Scientific American</i> , 262(1), 32–37. |
| Week 5 (2/12, 2/14, 2/15) | Intelligence from the bottom up | Barrett, L. (2011). <i>Beyond the brain</i> (pp. 39–49). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Braitenberg, V. (1984). <i>Vehicles</i> (pp. 1–14). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. |
| Week 6 (2/19, 2/21, 2/22) | Minds and brains | Marshall, P. J. (2009). Relating psychology and neuroscience: Taking up the challenges. <i>Perspectives on Psychological Science</i> , 4(2), 113–125. Weisberg, D. S. (2008). Caveat lector: The presentation of neuroscience information in the popular media. <i>Scientific Review of Mental Health Practice</i> , 6(1), 51–56. |
| Week 7 (2/26, 2/28, 3/1) | Two minds in one | Stanovich, K. E. (2009, November/December). Rational and irrational thought: The thinking that IQ tests miss. <i>Scientific American Mind</i> , 20(6), 34–39. Evans, J. St. B. T. (2003). In two minds: Dual-process accounts of reasoning. <i>Trends in Cognitive Sciences</i> , 7(10), 454–459. |
| Week 8 (3/5, 3/7, 3/8) | Consciousness | Chalmers, D. (1995). The puzzle of conscious experience. <i>Scientific American</i> , 273(6), 80–86. Wegner, D. M. (2004). Précis of <i>The illusion of conscious will</i> . <i>Behavioral and Brain Sciences</i> , 27(5), 649–659. |
| Part 2: Introduction to Moral Psychology | | |
| Week 9 (3/19, 3/21, 3/22) | Moral illusions | Pinker, S. (2008, January 13). The moral instinct. <i>The New York Times</i> . [nyti.ms/1bhbq92] Ariely, D. (2009, February). Our buggy moral code. <i>TED</i> . [http://bit.ly/2hRajN5] Clark, C. J., Chen, E. E., & Ditto, P. H. (2015). Moral coherence processes: Constructing culpability and consequences. <i>Current Opinion in Psychology</i> , 6, 123–128. |
| Week 10 (3/26, 3/28, 3/29) | Moral worth | Brandt, M. J., & Reyna, C. (2011). The chain of being: A hierarchy of morality. <i>Perspectives on Psychological Science</i> , 6(5), 428–446. Goodwin, G. P. (2015). Experimental approaches to moral standing. <i>Philosophy Compass</i> , 10(12), 914–926. |
| Week 11 (4/2, 4/4, 4/5) | Good and evil | Doris, J. M. (1998). Persons, situations, and virtue ethics. <i>Noûs</i> , 32(4), 504–530. Wynn, K., Bloom, P., Jordan, A., Marshall, J., & Sheskin, M. (in press). Not noble savages after all: Limits to early altruism. <i>Current Directions in Psychological Science</i> . |
| Week 12 (4/9, 4/11, 4/12) | Right and wrong | Greene, J. D. (2007). The secret joke of Kant's soul. In W. Sinnott-Armstrong (Ed.), <i>Moral psychology, Vol. 3: The neuroscience of morality: Emotion, brain disorders, and development</i> (pp. 35–79). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. |
| Week 13 (4/16, 4/18, 4/19) | Free will, luck, and moral responsibility | Roskies, A. (2006). Neuroscientific challenges to free will and responsibility. <i>Trends in Cognitive Sciences</i> , 10(9), 419–423. Nichols, S., Timmons, M., & Lopez, T. (2014). Using experiments in ethics – Ethical conservatism and the psychology of moral luck. In M. Christen et al. (Eds.), <i>Empirically informed ethics: Morality between facts and norms</i> (pp. 159–176). Springer. |
| Week 14 (4/23, 4/25, 4/26) | T.B.A. (based on a class vote) | Topics could include sensory perception, the cognitive science of religion, psycholinguistics, robot morals, animal minds, implicit biases, behavioral economics, emotions, culture, etc. |