

AP/PHIL 4082 – Special Topics Seminar in Cognitive Science: Central Cognition – Winter 2022

Fully Online

Professor: Javier Gomez-Lavin
Office: S438 Ross Building
Office Hours: by appointment *via zoom*
jglavin@yorku.ca

Course Description:

In his monograph on the subject, Jerry Fodor captured the state of investigations onto central cognitive processes via a pessimistic generalization that he termed the ‘First Law of the Nonexistence of Cognitive Science,’ claiming that as of 1983 ‘cognitive science hasn’t even *started*.’ Was Fodor right? Have we made any progress in understanding those central cognitive processes, from reasoning to reflection and imagination, which beckon as milestones in our philosophical and empirical pursuit of explaining and understanding the structure of our minds?

This reading and writing intensive seminar will investigate the key issues that outline these questions, helping—ideally—to bring them (and any possible answers) into better focus. We will begin with a review of the problem of cognition, including a detailed analysis of classical and contemporary texts on the subject. This will be followed by surveying exactly *what counts* as cognition, including a review of plant, non-human, basal, infant, core and collective cognition. We’ll end by reviewing whether central cognitive processes may be best thought of as *social* processes, with individual instances—e.g, what occurs during internal speech— parasitic on how we think *with* others.

Organization of the course:

The course will be held online, and almost entirely asynchronously. Each week will be devoted to one or two readings that will be hosted on *Perusall* (<https://perusall.com/>) a platform that allows for collaborative annotations of pdf documents.

Perusall Course Link: [REDACTED]

You are encouraged to set up an account and familiarize yourself with the platform prior to the start of classes. Often, I will post a short video to introduce the readings at the start of the week, and may choose to post a secondary video later in the week to clarify any significant confusions brought about by the reading. Students will be expected to annotate the readings each week, complete a set number of discussion posts on eClass, complete a longform research paper or essay, and meet with me, via zoom, twice throughout the course.

Course Learning Objectives:

After completing this course, students should be able to:

1. Understand the issues that underlie the topic central cognition, alongside Fodor’s pessimistic challenge to a coherent science of the mind.
2. Develop an appreciation for the breath of interdisciplinary, historical and contemporary work in philosophy and psychology on the different *genres* of cognition.

3. Demonstrate an ability to consistently and productively engage with a series of rich texts on a virtual platform, and lead peers in written, collaborative discussions of these texts.
4. Demonstrate a capacity to critically and charitably engage with contemporary empirical psychology.
5. Demonstrate an ability to write a succinct, clear, and charitable argumentative based essay analyzing the limits and issues of central cognition.

Course Prerequisites:

Prerequisite / Co-requisite: At least nine credits in AP/PHIL courses, including at least three credits from the following: AP/PHIL 3260 3.00 or AP/PHIL 3265 3.00

Technical Requirements for Taking the Course:

The course will be hosted entirely online. Students are required to have easy access to an up-to-date PC, Mac, or Linux compatible computer (persuall **does not** work well with mobile devices), and stable enough internet connection, to be able to: (a) watch recorded videos, (b) annotate texts hosted on perusall.com, (c) complete discussion posts, and (d) complete zoom calls with the professor.

Course Requirements & Assessment (subject to change):

Each week will feature one to two primary readings, often placed alongside youtube videos or other media. These are often difficult texts and will reward multiple reviews. Expect to spend at least three hours outside of class on these texts per week. We will cover nearly 400 pages of reading over the course, much of which will be self-directed.

Weekly Annotations 30% (10 x 3%): Students are required to annotate the text(s) every week on Perusall.com. Successful (i.e., full credit) annotations will: (a) engage with the professor's annotations, (b) engage with peer annotations and discussion threads, and (c) make use of the suite of evaluation systems offered by perusall (e.g., up-voting, confusion reporting etc.) I will post a video that walks through how the system works the first week of classes. You are encouraged to set up an account and familiarize yourself with the platform prior to the start of classes. Given that students have five (or more) days to annotate a text, there will be no "make-ups" for annotations.

Discussion threads 15% (3 x 5%): The readings for each week are themed around a given topic and are often split among a series of papers or chapters. At the start of the course, students will **commit** to starting discussion threads for **three** readings (specific papers or chapters) throughout the semester. Presently there are "30" readings available. Some of these readings will be prioritized for having more than one student complete a discussion thread. During the first week of classes, students will sign up (using a google sheet) to complete discussion threads (on perusall) for the given readings. The goal of these threads is to succinctly (under 200 words or so) summarize key points of the reading, and to prompt your peers into a discussion on perusall by posing a few constructive questions (e.g., two to three). Discussion threads **must be posted to Perusall by the end of business Wednesday** each week. Tardy or missed discussion threads will be heavily penalized. You may not be allowed to "make-up" a discussion thread. Discussion threads "count" for your weekly annotations for that given week.

One-on-one meetings: 5% (2 x 2.5%): 10 minute zoom meetings with each student at the beginning and end of the semester, sign up information will be posted on eclass the first week of courses.

Paper: 1 x 50% One longform, "IBAC" styled research paper or essay will be due at the end of term (date tbd). The paper will deal with issues of central cognition, but may bring in outside interests or related topics

at the professor's discretion. The paper will be graded in a **scaffolded** fashion, with components due on Turnitin.com at various points during the semester. Early in the semester, each student will have a short zoom meeting with the professor to discuss their project (5%). Shortly afterwards, students will submit an outline and bibliography for review (5%), followed by their "Background" section (10%), in turn followed by their "Analysis" section (10%). Near the end of the semester, students will have a second short zoom meeting with the professor to discuss how to edit and improve their draft (5%). The final paper (15%) will be turned in at the end of the semester. Plagiarism (e.g., using language and materials of another without proper citation) **will not be tolerated**.

Policies:

- I only allow incompletes for genuinely extraordinary reasons.
- I do not provide extra-credit opportunities.
- Keep in mind that I may not respond to your email outside of business hours (e.g., in the evening, over holidays, or during weekends).
- **Plagiarism and Cheating:** Under no circumstances will plagiarism or cheating be tolerated.

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory, in the sense that discussion threads must be completed in the weeks when students commit to them, and students are required to annotate the readings every week.

Grading:

Weekly annotations will be graded as Exemplarily, Pass, or Fail, with a corresponding point reduction. The chart below details how to convert your overall weekly annotation grade to letter grades for that portion of the course:

"A+"	"A"	"B+"	"B"	"C+"	"C"	"D+"	"D"	"E"	"F"
28-30	25-27	22-24	20-22	17-19	14-16	11-13	9-11	6-8	< 6

Discussion posts and paper components will be graded letter-wise (i.e., A+, A, B+, B etc.). For the purposes of estimation, when converting from an ordinal (letter) scale to a continuous (percentage) scale, I use a truncated measure that corresponds more closely to US American standards (e.g. A+ = 95% or greater, A = 90-94.9%, and so forth) rather than York's bizarre percentage-conversion guidelines (where an A can be anywhere from an 80-89 but a B only covers half the range [i.e. 70-74]). Bear in mind that percentages are estimates, *letter grades* are what are entered into York's system at the end of the semester.

If you wish to estimate your final grade, convert respective letter grades into a ballpark percentage score, multiply by their respective weightings, add them then reconvert the result into a letter grade using the same scale as before. This is, of course, only a rough estimate.

Here's an example below that uses York's typical percentage-conversion guidelines:

Annotations	Discussion Threads	Final Paper	Estimated Grade
22 → B+	A	B	$(77 \cdot .3) + (85 \cdot .15) + (73 \cdot .5)$ $+ 5 = 77.35$ rep
77	85	73	

Conversion: B+ ish

Depending on meeting grade it could stay as a B+ or become a B

"Wait, why can't our work just be graded along a percentage scale?" This is good question, but ultimately, as a third-year philosophy course, our task is not to memorize a series of facts or formulae, but rather to identify, critique and build written arguments that are often more than the sum of their parts. As such it's

not feasible or even pedagogically sound to assign a *quantitative* score to most work in this course. What makes one argument or essay a 90% instead of a 85% or “5” instead of a “6”? Why not a “5.5”? Why not a “5.52”? and so on. Why is one component (e.g., have a thesis statement) worth 1 point and not 2, or three?

Rather, if it helps, you can think of the letter grades as follows: “A+” Excellent, really stand-out work. “A” Very good, no obvious flaws or errors. “B+” Entirely satisfactory, but missing a few details. “B” satisfactory, but missing some key details or elements. “C+” Not entirely satisfactory, though perhaps shows genuine effort. “C” borderline satisfactory, barely meets the criteria set out. “D” incomplete or otherwise marginally acceptable etc.

Makeups: There are no “make-ups” allowed.

Assignment Submissions: Assignments will be submitted via eClass or pursall.

Papers: Late papers will generally not be accepted (as you will have written most of the paper throughout the semester). Late submission of paper components will be noted and penalties will apply. Missing scheduled zoom meetings with the professor will likewise be penalized.

Contacting the instructor: You should contact the instructor via email or the eClass direct message function. Please note that we will be responding to messages within 24 hours during working days (i.e. not on weekends or holidays).

Academic honesty and integrity: In this course, we strive to maintain academic integrity to the highest extent possible. All submitted coursework must be an expression of the student’s own understanding and ideas. Please familiarize yourself with the meaning of academic integrity by completing SPARK’s Academic Integrity module at the beginning of the course. Breaches of academic integrity range from cheating to plagiarism (i.e., the improper crediting of another’s work, the representation of another’s ideas as your own, etc.). All instances of academic dishonesty in this course will be reported to the appropriate university authorities, and can be punishable according to the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty.

Turnitin: To promote academic integrity in this course, students will be normally required to submit their written assignments to Turnitin (via the course eClass) for a review of textual similarity and the detection of possible plagiarism. In so doing, students will allow their material to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used only for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University’s use of the Turnitin service are described on the Turnitin.com website.

Course recordings: Any recordings for this course should be used for educational purposes only and as a means for enhancing accessibility. Students do not have permission to duplicate, copy and/or distribute the recordings outside of the class (these acts can violate not only copyright laws but also FIPPA).

Student conduct: All students are expected to treat their fellow students and the instructor with respect and charity, both in class in person and on any of our online platforms. Especially through mediums like Zoom, Perusall and the course eClass, no form of harassment, trolling, or disrespect will be tolerated.

Student Accommodations: We are committed to fairly accommodating students with disabilities. Please contact the instructors and Student Accessibility Services (<https://accessibility.students.yorku.ca/>) as soon as possible, and we will all work together to find a fair accommodation. Note that in addition to sending the letter, accommodations for individual assignments must specifically be requested well ahead of the assignment's deadline.

Zoom sessions: Recordings of my explanations (which only involve myself) and my slides (when used) will be made available on eClass. You also do not have permission to reproduce any lecture recordings on any platforms or websites outside of eClass.

Video policy: You are encouraged to use your video during your meetings with your instructor, if privacy or tech issues are not preventing you from doing otherwise. If you do need to keep your video off, please be sure to put a profile photo on your Zoom account, so that your classmates feel like they are talking to a person, rather than a black box with a name in it.

Texts – tentative reading list

Readings will be posted on our Perusall class website (linked via eClass). It is your responsibility to check both sites for new readings as they are made available.

- Professor’s annotations on Perusall, and accompanying video on eclass should drop by end of business on the date listed on the syllabus (e.g., Wednesdays).
- Discussion posts are due by end of business on the date listed on the syllabus (e.g., Wednesdays).
- Annotations are due by the following Monday, by end of business.

As an example:

3	26- Jan	Maybe psychology was right all along, or how dualism will save the (mental) day	Kahneman: <i>Thinking Fast and Slow, Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4</i>	- Annotations due by 1/31
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This entry can be read as follows: Professor’s annotations, videos (if required), and Student’s discussion posts will be uploaded to *Perusall* before end of business (around 5pm, EST) on *Wednesday*, January 26th. They can, of note, be uploaded earlier (e.g., Monday the 24th). Your annotations will be due by end of business, Monday the 31st. Grades will be tabulated for Discussion posts, annotations etc. on the following day.

	Date	Topic	Reading	Assignments
1	12- Jan	Syllabus day <i>video on eClass</i>	Fodor, Jerry (1985). “Precis of <i>Modularity of Mind</i> ” 1-5. Gomez-Lavin, J. (ms) <i>this syllabus that you’re reading now.</i>	- Practice annotations on syllabus and Fodor (due by 1/17). - Sign up for three discussion post sections by 1/17
2	19- Jan	<i>Pinker vs. Fodor</i> , or how <i>does</i> the mind work?	Pinker: <i>So how does the mind work?</i> Fodor: <i>Reply to Steven Pinker “So how does the mind work?”</i> Pinker: <i>A reply to Jerry Fodor on How the Mind Works</i>	- Annotations due by 1/24 (A1)
3	26- Jan	Maybe psychology was right all along, or	Kahneman: <i>Thinking Fast and Slow, Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4</i>	- Annotations due by 1/31 (A2)

		how dualism will save the (mental) day		
-	2-Feb	<i>no "class"</i>	<i>no annotations req. – professor at conference, read ahead for large section next week</i>	<i>no class</i>
4	9-Feb	Maybe psychology was right all along, or how dualism will save the (mental) day, continued	Kahneman: <i>Thinking Fast and Slow</i> , Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9	- Annotations due by 2/14 (A3)
5	16-Feb	Challenges to a dual system account of reason	Mercier & Sperber: <i>The Enigma of Reason</i> , part 1 (Chapters 1 & 2)	- Annotations due by 2/21 (A4) <i>handout on topics and course papers!</i>
-	23-Feb	<i>no class</i>	<i>Winter break – but get ahead of the reading for next week!</i>	-
6	2-Mar	The nature of reason	Mercier & Sperber: <i>The Enigma of Reason</i> , part 2 (Chapters 3, 4, & 5)	- Annotations due by 3/7 (A5) Outline and Bibliography due 3/7
7	9-Mar	Rethinking reason, part 1	Mercier & Sperber: <i>The Enigma of Reason</i> , part 2/3 (Chapters 6, 7, & 8)	- Annotations due by 3/14 (A6)
8	16-Mar	Rethinking reason, part 2	Mercier & Sperber: <i>The Enigma of Reason</i> , part 3 (Chapters 9 & 10)	- Annotations due by 3/21 (A7) Background Section due 3/21
9	23-Mar	Slime mold and emergent cognition	Clark, Andy: <i>Being there: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again</i> , chapters 4 & 7	- Annotations due by 3/28 (A8)
10	30-Mar	“minimal” and “synthetic” cognition	Levin et al. (2021). Uncovering cognitive similarities and differences, conservation and innovation Levin: (2020) <i>Life, death, and self: Fundamental questions of primitive cognition viewed through the lens of body plasticity and synthetic organisms</i>	- Annotations due by 4/4 (A9) Analysis Section due 4/4
11	6-April	Origins of thought	Godfrey-Smith: <i>Metazoa: Animal life and the birth of the mind</i> Chapters 2, 3, 4, & 5	- Annotations due by 4/11 (A10)
-	Early-mid April	<i>Final Meetings</i>	<i>Final Meetings</i>	<i>Final Paper due</i>