

WHAT IS THINKING?: THE HUMAN BETWEEN ANIMAL AND MACHINE

PHI 100
Spring 2019
MWF 10:00-11:00am
Melville Library N4530

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The course examines what it means to be a human being in terms of the capacity for conceptual thought and subjectivity. We will question whether and in what sense other animals can think, and if so, how human thinking is unique from it. We will then examine the question of artificial intelligence and transhumanism, questioning whether the human body is not a condition for thinking itself. As part of these investigations, we will question what kind of ethical and political obligations emerge from thinking. What are specifically human domains of experience—if any? What obligations emerge from being able to form truth statements, judgments, and arguments? Can the human being have access to truths that are eternal (e.g. in logic or mathematics), and does this matter in how we treat the question of animal and machine?

The semester is divided into three units:

1. *Aristotle and Descartes on the Nature of Human Thinking*. We will examine 'classical' philosophical accounts of the nature of thinking through Aristotle and Descartes. In particular, we will consider how both Aristotle and Descartes understand thinking to involve something 'eternal' and/or independent of the body. We will consider *why* they take mind to be something distinct from body and how this distinguishes human from animal, putting into view the ethical and political implications of their respective accounts.
2. *Naturalism and Post-Darwinian Perspectives on Human and Animal*. We will examine philosophical responses to Darwin, particularly as it relates to the naturalist turn in contemporary philosophy. We will question how the human-animal divide is refigured when mind is understood to 'emerge' from nature rather than to be its own independent principle. In what ways is the human being an existential 'rupture' from the rest of nature? Is the 'truth' of the human being located in its natural existence, or is there another way of imagining human exceptionalism despite certain evolutionary continuities?
3. *Artificial Intelligence and the Philosophy of Mind*. We will examine philosophical debates about the Turing Test and other texts that challenge whether artificial intelligence is possible. What are the limits between human and machine, and can something that approximates or supplants human subjectivity emerge from mechanical movements and computer programs?

Degree Requirements and Prerequisites

This course fulfills DEC B and SBC Hum requirements. Although this is an introductory course and does not assume prior philosophical knowledge, there will be a number of intensive readings and difficult writing assignments requiring serious commitment from each course member.

Required Texts

Most of the texts we will read are available in PDF form on Blackboard. These texts must be printed out and brought to class when appropriate. Otherwise, I have ordered students to purchase:

Aristotle, *Aristotle: Introductory Readings* (Hackett Classics) ISBN: 9780872203396.
Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Hackett Classics) ISBN: 9780872201927.

If you have financial concerns about obtaining these texts, please contact me as soon as possible.

Assignments and Grading

Attendance, Participation, and Short Writing Assignments (20%): Attendance will be taken every class. You must arrive on time and participate regularly during class sessions. You must bring all relevant course materials in hard copy to class. I also conduct class with group discussions in mind, which means that students should be prepared to contribute meaningfully to questions. In addition to in-class discussions and debates, your participation grade will include short 1-2 page doubled-spaced responses to questions I give throughout the semester. Expect 5-6 or so of these short assignments, graded check, check-minus, or check-plus. Based on these assignments, I reserve the right to raise (or lower) your grade by up to 2/3 of a letter grade (e.g. B+ to A).

Reading quizzes (20%, 10 quizzes for 2% each): There will be ten short reading quizzes consisting of straightforward reading comprehension questions. Being absent and thus missing a quiz will automatically result in a 0 for that quiz, unless due to medical emergency or other extenuating circumstances.

Midterm Exam (30%): An in-class midterm exam will consist of short open responses to be written during the course of a designated class period.

Final Exam (30%): The take-home final exam will consist of two short essay topics. I will distribute a list of possible questions before the exam, along with my expectations. Each essay must be 900-1000 words, for a total of 1800-2000 words.

Grading Scale: 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 (below 60%)

Course Policies

Lateness and absences: You are allowed two unexcused absences during the semester. After you miss three classes unexcused, your participation grade will drop by a letter grade per absence. If you miss six classes without a valid excuse, you will fail the course. Lateness will not be tolerated. If you are consistently late more than five minutes for class, I will begin counting late arrivals as absences.

Technology Policy: This is a no-screens course, meaning that laptops and cellphones are not allowed. However, exceptions will be made for students who require the appropriate services.

Disability Support Services (DSS) Statement: If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services, ECC (Educational Communications Center) Building, Room 128, (631) 632-6748. They will determine with you what accommodations, if any, are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.

Academic Integrity Statement: Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person's work as your own is always wrong. Faculty is required to report any suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the Academic Judiciary. Faculty in the Health Sciences Center (School of Health Technology & Management, Nursing, Social Welfare, Dental Medicine) and School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty please refer to the academic judiciary website at: http://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/academic_integrity/index.html.

Critical Incident Management: Stony Brook University expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty are required to report to the Office of University Community Standards any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, or inhibits students' ability to learn. Faculty in the HSC Schools and the School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures. Further information about most academic matters can be found in the Undergraduate Bulletin, the Undergraduate Class Schedule, and the Faculty-Employee Handbook.

Course Schedule. * = Assignment Due

I. Aristotle and Descartes on the Nature of Human Thinking

January 28	Introduction: What is Philosophy?
January 30	Aristotle on the Four Causes. <i>De Anima</i> , Book I.
February 1	Aristotle on the Soul. <i>De Anima</i> , Book II.
*February 4	Aristotle on the Soul. <i>De Anima</i> , Book III.
February 6	Aristotle on the Soul. Review.
February 8	Aristotle on the Good. <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> Book I.
February 11	Aristotle on the Good. <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> Book II.
February 13	Aristotle on the Good. <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> Book VI.
February 15	Aristotle on the Good. <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> Book X.
*February 18	The Value of Aristotle. Review / Buffer Class.
February 20	Descartes on Substance Dualism. <i>Meditations</i> Book I.
February 22	Descartes on Substance Dualism. <i>Meditations</i> Book II.
February 18	Descartes on Substance Dualism. <i>Meditations</i> Book VI.
February 20	Descartes on Substance Dualism. <i>Meditations</i> Book VI.
March 1	Descartes on Substance Dualism. Review / Buffer Class.
*March 4	Descartes and Animal Spirits, <i>Treatise on Man</i> selections.
March 6	Elizabeth and Descartes on Mind and Body, <i>Correspondences</i> .
March 8	Elizabeth and Descartes on Mind and Body, <i>Correspondences</i> .
March 11	Anne Conway: The Limits of Rationalism. <i>Principles</i> selections.
March 13	Review for Midterm.
March 15	MIDTERM EXAM
March 18	SPRING BREAK
March 20	SPRING BREAK
March 22	SPRING BREAK

II. Naturalism and Post-Darwinian Reflections on Human and Animal.

March 25	Darwin and Evolution. <i>Descent of Man</i> , Ch. 1.
March 27	Darwin and Evolution. <i>Descent of Man</i> , Ch. 2.
March 29	Darwin and Evolution. <i>Descent of Man</i> , Ch. 3.
*April 1	Darwin and Evolution. <i>Descent of Man</i> , Ch. 5.
April 3	Nagel on other Minds. "What is it like to be a Bat?"
April 5	Singer on Animal Rights. "All Animals are Equal."
April 8	Heidegger on Animals. "The Animal is Poor in World."

April 10 Heidegger on Animals. "The Animal is Poor in World."
April 12 Heidegger on Animals. "The Animal is Poor in World."

*April 15 Bataille on Animality. "Animality."
April 17 Bataille on Animality. "Animality."
April 19 Nietzsche on Animals. "O My Animals!"

III. Artificial Intelligence and the Philosophy of Mind

April 22 The Turing Test. "Computing Machinery and Intelligence."
April 24 The Turing Test. "Computing Machinery and Intelligence."
April 26 Hobbes on Ratiocination. *De Corpore*, selections.

*April 29 Searle on Mind. "Is the Brain's Mind a Computer Program?"
May 1 Searle on Mind. "Is the Brain's Mind a Computer Program?"
May 3 The Churchlands on Mind. "Could a Machine Think?"

May 6 The Churchlands on Mind. "Could a Machine Think?"
May 8 Dennett on Consciousness. *Consciousness Explained*, introduction.
May 10 Review of the course.