

H14532: On the Problems of Minds and Machines

2021 Summer Course for HSSP

Teacher: Keith Murray

1 Description

Have you ever looked in the mirror and wondered, "What is going on in my head?" Philosophers and scientists have thought about this question for centuries and still have no definitive answer. Is our brain just a biological machine? Are we more than our brain? What is color? What is consciousness? This class aims at analyzing the fundamental thought and scientific experiments that try to answer these questions. My goal is for everyone taking the class to be able to think critically about the nature of the mind by the end.

2 Goals

To spark an interest in the problems of the mind and brain and to develop the tools needed to think critically about these problems.

3 Expectations

Everyone is expected to respect each other's opinion and discuss in an orderly fashion.

4 Prerequisites

An interest in philosophy and science and a willingness to engage in class discussions.

5 Topics

The class will span over 6 weeks. Each week we will discuss a different topic with an accompanied thought experiment.

5.1 Week 1

Topic: Comparing the philosophical and scientific methods

Thought Experiment: If a tree falls in the middle of the woods and no one is around, does it make a sound?

5.2 Week 2

Topic: Analyzing the basis of existence

Thought Experiment: René Descartes and the evil demon

5.3 Week 3

Topic: Analyzing the basis of knowledge

Thought Experiment: Frank Jackson and Mary the color scientist

5.4 Week 4

Topic: Understanding the computational process

Thought Experiment: John Searle and the Chinese Room

5.5 Week 5

Topic: Understanding the phenomenological process

Thought Experiment: What Is It Like to Be a Bat?

5.6 Week 6

Topic: Comprehending rationality and free will

Thought Experiment: Newcomb's paradox