

Course Syllabus: FYS 100
Animal Minds
Fall 2009: TR 12:00-1:15 PM, Greene Hall 310

Instructor: William Gordon Ph.D., Professor of Psychology
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Required Textbook

Dennett, D.C., *Kinds of Minds* (1996), Basic Books (Perseus Books Group).

Course Description

In the 17th century Descartes espoused the view that humans are distinct from all other species in that only humans possess conscious minds and the ability to monitor and reflect upon their own thoughts. Although this idea of human distinctiveness was challenged in the late 19th century by the rise of evolutionary theory, it remains an idea that is widely held today. The purpose of this course is to explore this question of human distinctiveness in greater detail. To this end we will critically examine evidence from the field of comparative cognition that deals with higher level cognitive processes and abilities in non-human species—processes and abilities that are often associated with the existence of mind in humans. The goal of this course is to use this question and the evidence surrounding it as a vehicle for developing critical thinking skills, the ability to write compelling arguments based on the evidence, and the ability to present and evaluate positions orally in classroom discussions.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

The evaluation of student performance will be based on four writing assignments that deal with issues raised in the required readings and in our classroom discussions. The first three writing assignments call for relatively short papers (approximately 4 pages). Each of these papers will count for 20% of the final grade. The fourth assignment will call for a longer, more comprehensive paper (approximately 8 pages) and this paper will count for 30% of the final grade. The specific topics and requirements for each of the four papers can be found on the last page of the syllabus.

In addition to these written assignments, students are expected to complete the required reading for each class session before coming to class, and are expected to be fully prepared to raise and answer questions, and to participate in class discussions. The quality of participation in class discussions will count for 10% of the final grade.

Grading

Each of the four papers will be graded on a 100 point scale. The score for each of the first three papers will be multiplied by .2 (20%) and the score for the final paper will be multiplied by .3 (30%). The sum of the resulting four scores will constitute the total score for written work (a total of 90 points is possible). Class participation for the semester will be rated on a 10-point scale, and this rating will be added to the total score for written work to yield the final number grade in the course. The following shows the correspondence between final numerical and final letter grades:

A	92-100	B+	88-89	C+	78-79	D+	68-69	F	< 60
A-	90-91	B	82-87	C	72-77	D	62-67		
		B-	80-81	C-	70-71	D-	60-61		

Note that the grading of the written work will be based on the clarity of the writing, the organization of the paper, the degree to which critical thinking and analysis are evident, and the degree to which conclusions are supported by the evidence presented in the paper.

Instructor Expectations

- A. Class Attendance:** All students are expected to attend class regularly, since class participation will be graded, and absences will negatively impact class discussions. If possible, I would like to be informed in advance if any student knows that he or she will be missing class on a given day.
- B. Due Dates for Written Assignments:** All written assignments (including drafts) must be turned in on the scheduled due dates unless you have a valid excuse (e.g., illness, significant family issue, conflicting university-sanctioned activity). In order for me to grant an extension for turning in a paper, I will need a written excuse and will need to approve the excuse as valid.
- C. Academic Honesty:** Students are expected to adhere fully to the Wake Forest University Honor Code in all activities related to the course. Significant, confirmed violations of the Honor Code such as cheating or plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course. In terms of your written assignments, you are free to discuss with others your ideas and the approach you are taking, and you are encouraged to share with other students any valuable information resources you have identified for a given topic. **However, all of your written work must be your own.**
- D. Special Concerns:** For students with documented physical or learning disabilities, special accommodations for course activities can be arranged as needed. Should you have such a documented need, or if you feel that some other

extenuating circumstance is likely to interfere with your ability to meet course requirements, please make me aware of your situation as soon as possible.

Course Schedule

Please note that this schedule is tentative and is subject to change as circumstances require.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading</u>
TR 8/27	Syllabus/Introduction	-----
T 9/1	Animal Intelligence: An Overview	Film
TR 9/3	Kinds of Minds	Dennett Ch. 1
T 9/8	The Case for Animal Minds	Griffin
TR 9/10	Discussion	-----
T 9/15	The Case Against Animal Minds	Blumberg/Wasserman
TR 9/17	Discussion	-----
T 9/22	Human & Animal Memories	Gordon
TR 9/24	No Class Scheduled	-----
T 9/29	Memory (continued)	Gordon
TR 10/1	Animal Concepts	Pepperberg
T 10/6	Self-Concept in Animals	Gallup
TR 10/8	Self-Concept (continued)	-----
T 10/13	Animal Communication	Griffin
TR 10/15	Symbolic Communication/Language	Film
T 10/20	Language (continued)	Fleming
TR 10/22	Discussion	-----
T 10/27	Reasoning/Tool Use/Problem-Solving	Gould
TR 10/29	Discussion	-----
T 11/3	Deception	Miles
TR 11/5	Deception	Woodruff/Premack
T 11/10	Altruism/Cooperation/Culture	Connor/Norris
TR 11/12	Discussion	-----
T 11/17	The Creation of Thinking	Dennett Ch. 5
TR 11/19	Discussion	-----
T 11/24	Our Minds, Other Minds	Dennett Ch. 6
TR 11/26	Thanksgiving Break	-----
T 12/1	Ethical/Moral Implications	-----
TR 12/3	What Can We Conclude?	-----

Note that all assigned readings (with the exception of those contained in the Dennett book) will be distributed to the class at least 1 week prior to the class meeting in which the assignment will be discussed.

Topics For Required Papers

1. **The Case for Animal Minds:** Based on the preliminary evidence we have discussed in class thus far, present your best argument in favor of the idea that some animals may possess conscious minds.
Paper Length: 800-1000 words
1st Draft Due: 9/15
Final Paper Due: 9/22

2. **The Existence of Complex Concepts in Animals:** Based on the evidence we have read and discussed in class, discuss the proposition that animals are capable of forming complex concepts including the concept of “self.”
Paper Length: 800-1000 words
1st Draft Due: 10/13
Final Paper Due: 10/20

3. **Language and Deception as Indicators of Mind:** Based on your readings and our in-class discussions, argue against one of the following propositions:
 - a. The fact that some animals can be taught to use symbolic language is clear evidence that these animals possess conscious minds.

 - b. The fact that some animals appear to use deception in their interactions is clear evidence that these animals possess conscious minds.
Paper Length: 800-1000 words
Final Paper Due: 11/10

4. **Conclusions and Implications:** Based on your evaluation of all the evidence you have considered this semester, what conclusion concerning the existence of animal minds do you draw, and what are the most important moral/ethical implications of that conclusion? In discussing the conclusion you have reached, be certain to cite the key evidence that has led to your conclusion.

Paper Length: 1800-2000 words
Final Paper Due: 12/3