

FYS: Intelligent Life

Phil 197B · Prof. Dunn

Fall 2013
MWF 2:50 - 3:50
Asbury 110
DePauw University

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Course Description

What is intelligence and what kinds of things can be intelligent? According to one view, intelligence is closely related to logical reasoning and humans are the only kinds of things that can be intelligent. This view is suggested in the work of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, as well as the 17th-Century French philosopher René Descartes. But perhaps intelligence extends more widely than this. Perhaps animals or even machines can be intelligent. Perhaps there is extraterrestrial intelligence. Perhaps groups of agents can themselves be intelligent. But then again, perhaps not. In this course we will try to clarify these issues by looking at a variety of work from philosophy, psychology, computer science, and physics. At the end of the course we will look at some startling data that suggests that we humans may not be as intelligent as we think.

Like all First Year Seminars, this course is designed to introduce you to the college learning environment and to help you cultivate important academic skills. Though there are many important academic skills, we will focus on three in particular in this course:

Writing. The ability to write clearly and thoughtfully is essential. Writing is one of the main ways of communicating your ideas to others; it is also an excellent way to clarify your own views on a subject. Like all first-year seminars, this class will be writing-intensive and focus on helping you improve as a writer.

Discussion. Almost all of the material you will be learning at college is complex and challenging. Discussion can help to clear up confusion, to uncover different viewpoints, or to push the inquiry deeper. In this class you will be expected to engage in informed discussion on a daily basis.

Reading. Writing and discussion are important. But they must be *about* something. In academic work, the focus of our discussion and our writing is often someone else's writing. Accordingly, it is imperative to develop the ability to read, understand, and engage with difficult texts. This class will expose you to a variety of different academic writing, with a focus on the ability to understand the thesis an author is arguing for, and the argument for that thesis.

Books

- ▶ Graff & Birkenstein, *They Say/I Say*
- ▶ Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds*

Many of the things we read for this course are journal articles. These will be posted on Moodle.

Course Requirements

There are two main requirements for this course: (1) In-Class Participation and (2) Writing Assignments. These are each described below.

PARTICIPATION

1. In-Class Writing Activities

Throughout the semester there will be at least six in-class writing activities. The tentative dates for these activities are listed on the class schedule. For most of these activities you receive full credit for completing the activity. However, to receive credit for these, you must be in class on the day of the activity.

2. Free Writing

On some days you will be asked to write for 5-10 minutes on a question related to the day's reading. Writing is often a useful way to figure out your own ideas on a topic. Free writes give you a good chance to identify your own ideas about the material we are reading. You will submit your free writes to me, and I will read them, but they are graded purely on whether or not you complete the free write. You cannot make these up if you are late or absent.

3. Discussion

Informed discussion is one of the best ways to learn philosophy. I expect that each day you will be a good contributor to class discussion. What is it to be a good contributor to class discussion? Here are some basic ground rules:

(1.) **Always listen to the person who is speaking.** This means, for instance, that if I were to ask you what someone else said, you could give an accurate summary of that person's comment.

(2.) If you have a comment to add to the discussion, **explain how what you are saying ties in with what others have said before.** For instance, you might want to respond to something another class member says. A good way to introduce your comment is something like this: "John just argued that computers cannot think because they are governed by rules. However, I think...".

(3.) Class discussion is a good way for us to see the different viewpoints people have with respect to a certain issue. When giving your view, **don't merely register your opinion about a topic, also try to explain your reasons for holding that opinion.**

(4.) A good discussion is not merely a chance for everyone to present his or her own view. A good discussion is a *dialogue* among members of our class. Given this, **strive to respond to what others say by asking critical questions.** For instance: "Lisa, you just said that animals are not intelligent because they don't use language. I thought that was an interesting idea. But could you say more about why you don't think animals use language? After all, my dog seems to communicate with other dogs, at least in some sort of way."

(5.) **No laptops or smartphones during class.** If you're anything like me, a smartphone or a laptop is too much of a distraction during a discussion. No matter how engaging the discussion, at some point I give in to temptation and check Facebook or Twitter. So, unless you have made previous arrangements with me, keep these items away during class.

4. Reading Quizzes

It's hard to learn if you don't read the articles and books for this course. Class discussion won't be very profitable, either. But sometimes it's hard to get motivated to actually do the reading. Think of reading quizzes as that little extra bit of motivation. On nine days throughout the semester, there will be a reading quiz at the beginning of class. They will be unannounced and will consist of two questions, with each question worth 1 point. You receive full credit for this portion of the class if you have 14 or more points.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Below I briefly describe the writing assignments (WAs) for this class. More detailed information about these assignments is available on Moodle.

WA1: The Machine Papers

This assignment is actually a sequence of three papers, each slightly longer than the last, all on the same topic. The first paper is no more than 1 page. The second is 1.5–2 pages. The third is 2.5–3 pages.

After your third Machine Paper, you'll meet with me for a writing conference.

WA2: Possible Scenario Paper

For this assignment you will be addressing a philosophical issue having to do with extraterrestrial intelligence by describing a coherent scenario. The story should be 3–5 pages.

WA3: Letter to Editor

This is an assignment that will allow you to practice concise and clear argumentative writing. The letter has a strict word limit of 500 words.

This assignment will have a peer-review component, where you provide feedback on someone else's letter and receive feedback from them on yours.

WA4: Writing about Science

This is an assignment will allow you to practice the skill of reading scientific writing and communicating it to a non-scientific audience in a clear and engaging way. You will write about what scientific article, out of two options. This paper will be 3–5 pages.

WA5: Closed Research Paper

This is the most complex writing assignment in this course. The final goal is a 5–7 page paper where you argue for a thesis that is relevant to the topic of our course. Good arguments, however, do not exist in a void—they are always in response to someone else's view. So, you will need to incorporate the view of at least one other person who takes a stand relevant to your thesis. To help you with this, I have provided a *Research List* of papers and book chapters. You are required to use at least one item on the Research List in your paper as well as class readings relevant to your thesis.

Because this is a complex assignment, there are several stages along the way:

Stage 1: Write a first draft of your paper. This first draft will undergo peer review.

Stage 2: On the basis of the peer feedback, write a revised second draft of your final paper.

Stage 3: I will read your second draft and we will then have a one-on-one conference to discuss your paper.

Stage 4: On the basis of our conference, write a revised final draft of your paper. This is your final product.

WA6: Final Reflective Paper

In lieu of a final exam you will write a final paper where you reflect on the broad themes of the class. In this paper I expect to see evidence that you have kept up with and understood the class readings, and that you have made connections between the topics we have covered. This paper is due on the last day of finals week. So you can be thinking about this throughout the semester, here is the prompt for the final reflective paper:

Consider the following two claims:

Claim 1. Intelligence extends further than commonly believed.

Claim 2. Intelligence is more limited than commonly believed.

Drawing on the reading throughout the semester, argue for Claim 1, argue for Claim 2, argue for both claims, or argue against both claims. You should appeal to the work of others in your paper, but you should not merely summarize. The goal of this paper is to reflect on the material we have covered this semester and fit it into a coherent view about intelligence.

Detailed information about these assignments is available on our course Moodle site. Due dates are included in the schedule at the end of the syllabus.

Grading Summary

Writing Assignments (85%)	
WA1: Machine Papers (3):	15% (1%/6%/8%)
WA2: Possible Scenario:	10%
WA3: Letter to Editor:	15%
WA4: Writing about Science:	15%
WA5: Closed Research Paper:	20%
WA6: Final Reflective Paper:	10%
Participation (15%)	
In-Class Participation & Writing:	5%
Peer Reviews:	5%
Reading Quizzes:	5%

Special Considerations

DePauw University is committed to providing equal access to academic programs and university-administered activities and reasonable modifications/accommodations to students with disabilities in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, as amended in 2008. Any student needing special accommodations due to a disability should contact the Coordinator of Student Disability Services, Pam Roberts, 302 Harrison Hall or call (765) 658-6267. It is the responsibility of each student to discuss implementation of approved modifications/accommodations with each faculty member and/or staff member

within one week of the date of receiving a modification/accommodation approval memo or within the first two weeks of the academic semester.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is very important, and violations are serious offenses, which I take very seriously. There is a clear Academic Integrity Policy that can be found here:

<http://www.depauw.edu/handbooks/student/acadlife/app/aip/>

One of the things we will do in this course is to help clear up any confusion about academic integrity. Nevertheless, it is ultimately your responsibility to read, understand, and follow the university policy. If you are unclear about what constitutes a violation of academic integrity, you must contact me for clarification. Ignorance is not an excuse. In this way, violations of academic integrity are sort of like speeding: if you're driving 45 mph in a 25 mph zone, you're going to get a ticket, even if you didn't see the sign. The *minimum* penalty for violations of Academic Integrity is a 0 on the relevant assignment and a further reduction in your overall grade.