

# **The Philosophy of Animal Minds**

**PHI4930**

Spring 2023

University of Florida

T | Period 4 (10:40 AM – 11:30 AM)

R | Period 4-5 (10:40 AM – 12:35 PM)

Location: MAT 0051

**Professor:** Amber Ross [amber.ross@ufl.edu](mailto:amber.ross@ufl.edu)  
**Professor Office:** FLO 301  
**Professor Phone:** 352-273-1811  
**Office hours:** Tuesdays 3-4:30, and by appointment

## **Course Description:**

How do animals experience the world, and how is their experience similar to and different from ours?

We need to be able to answer this question for many practical and theoretical purposes—what are the limits, both scientific and philosophical, of our ability to answer it? In this course we will address questions such as:

- What is a mind? Which animals have minds? How can we learn about them?
- What kinds of emotions and thoughts do nonhuman animals have?
- Who is self-conscious?
- Can animals have moral agency? Can they have culture?

The course is an examination of the philosophy of animal minds, and also draws from natural and social sciences: cognitive ethology and psychology. We will use a philosophical approach to examine several empirical examples and case studies, including: Cheney and Seyfarth's vervet monkey research, Thorndike's cat puzzle boxes, Jensen's research into humans and chimpanzees and the ultimatum game, Pankseep and Burgdorf's research on rat laughter, and Clayton and Emery's research on memory and metamemory in scrub-jays.

## **Course Readings**

**Links to all required readings will be found in the weekly Modules** (and stored under the “Files” tab in the “Readings” folder) ([Links to an external site.](#))

The main source of our readings will be chapters from *The Animal Mind, 2nd Edition*, by Kristin Andrews (Routledge, 2020)

A very useful online guide for writing philosophy papers is available here:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html> (Links to an external site.)

The journal *Animal Sentience* will be an excellent resource:

<https://animalstudiesrepository.org/animalsent/> (Links to an external site.)

The new website, *Animal Ethics from the Margins*, is another excellent resource

<https://animaethicsfromthemargins.com/> (Links to an external site.)

## **Graded Requirements:**

### **Research Project (50%)**

**Research Paper (40%):** Length: 2500-3200 words

The main goal of this course is select and complete your own original research project and to present that research to the class. The class will read an article that you select to accompany your presentation which engages with your own original research.

**Research work-in progress Presentation, A/V component, and article selection (5%):**

The content of the last several weeks of the course will be determined by students' research projects.

Each student will select an article for the class to read for the week that they are giving their research work-in-progress presentation. You must **submit your article choice to me one week in advance of your presentation** (so that your classmates have time to read it).

Each student will give a **short (max 15 min) work-in-progress presentation** on their research topic, followed by a short (10 min) Question and Answer session. You are required to provide the class with a **A/V component** to accompany the presentation (usually a slideshow) that summarizes the main points of your presentation.

**Research Paper Proposal & Outline (5%):**

A proposal for your research paper is due at approximately mid-term. We will discuss how to complete this assignment as the date approaches.

There will be a rolling deadline for the outline of the content and structure of your research paper, depending on the date of your research presentation. (Outlines are due at least 1 week ahead of your presentation). We will discuss how to complete this assignment as the date approaches.

The proposal and outline will be worth a combined total of **5%** of your final grade.

**Other Written Work (45%):**

**Short Paper (25%):**

Due **Tuesday Oct 13<sup>th</sup>**. Length will be approx. 900–1200 words, and I will provide you with a paper topic.

**Perusal assignments (20%):**

See course website for more details

**Attendance and Participation (5%)**

Grading Scale	(round up from .5)
A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-98
B	84-86
B-	80-83
C+	77-79
C	74-76
C-	70-73
D+	67-69
D	64-66
D-	60-63
E	0-59

**Other Requirements:**

- **Regular Attendance, Reading, and Note-Taking:** In order to have the fullest understanding of the material you will need to be present for each class meeting and take notes on the class discussion. Given that we are all subject to the whims of our internet connection, there will be no penalty for missing a class, but to get the most out of this course you will want to be part of each of our class meetings.

- **Research Presentation Meeting- optional & by request:** I will hold extra office hours for seminar presenters beginning in mid-October. I will be available to meet with each presenter individually the week before they present to discuss their upcoming presentation- please email me to set up an appointment.
- **Presentation Q&A:** A short Question and Answer session will follow every presentation. There will not be time for every student to ask a question following every presentation, but at minimum you should plan to ask 1 question per presentation week (there are 6 presentations per week).

## **Academic Honesty and Plagiarism**

Most instances of academic dishonesty can be avoided by thoroughly citing the resources you have used to help you understand the topic on which you're writing. **If you have read something that helped you understand the material, cite it!** Failure to cite sources is the most common (and easily avoidable) academic offense.

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states:

“We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.”

The Honor Code (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>) ([Links to an external site.](#)) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

Plagiarism on any assignment will automatically result in a grade of “E” for the course. Plagiarism is defined in the University of Florida's Student Honor Code as follows:

“A student shall not represent as the student’s own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to): a. Quoting oral or written materials, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution. b. Submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student.”

Students found guilty of academic misconduct will be prosecuted in accordance with the procedures specified in the UF honesty policy.

## **Evaluations**

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance

on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/> (Links to an external site.). Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/> (Links to an external site.). Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/> (Links to an external site.).

## **Campus Resources**

You will find the most up-to-date information on campus resources for students [here](#):

## **Academic Resources**

**Library Support** <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask> (Links to an external site.)

**Writing Studio** <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>

## **Attendance, Illness, Religious Holidays, and Twelve Day Rule**

In order to have the fullest understanding of the material you will need to be present for each class meeting and take notes on the class discussion. Given that we are all subject to the whims of our internet connection, there will be no penalty for missing a class, but to get the most out of this course you will want to be part of each of our class meetings.

Official requirements for class attendance, religious holidays, and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx> (Links to an external site.).

## **E-mail guidelines:**

(1) If you need some practical information about the course you should **look at most recently updated syllabus or on the website**. E-mails requesting information which is available on the most recently updated syllabus or on the website will not be answered.

(2) If you want to discuss a substantive philosophical question you should bring it up in class or visit my office hours. E-mails asking substantive philosophical questions will not be answered in full. (You will likely receive a note suggesting that you visit one of my office hours or arrange an appointment to chat.)

If, after reading (1) & (2) you still think you should e-mail me, you are welcome to do so at [amber.ross@ufl.edu](mailto:amber.ross@ufl.edu). I will try to answer e-mail within a week. You must use your “ufl” address.

**Please note: I may not read email between 5pm and 9am.**

### **How to do well in this course:**

1. **Be sure to read the assigned material before our class meeting.** This will help to ensure that our class time is quality time.
2. **After class, re-read the material for the session,** paying special attention to the questions that you had before. Hopefully the material will make much more sense to you now.
3. **Bring specific questions with you to class.** Even if there are aspects of the readings or study questions you didn't fully grasp, the fact that you tried should help you to narrow down what it is that you don't get.
4. **See me in office hours,** if there are still questions you are unclear about. That's what office hours are for. Don't be shy.
5. **Manage your time well.** Many students make the mistake of waiting until a few days before papers are due to start writing. That is *bad* time management. The **same number of hours** devoted to the material BEFORE class can lead to a much more efficient use of your time, better understanding, and higher grades.

### **On Reading Philosophy Texts:**

You will be expected to have done the assigned reading **before** you come to class to be able to follow the lecture and participate in tutorial discussion. Learning philosophy is as much learning a style of thinking and reasoning as it is learning certain contents. Therefore it is important that you try to participate actively and learn to engage with the readings critically.

You should budget enough time for the reading to be able to read each piece **at least three times**. Don't expect to be able to 'breeze through' the texts and you can avoid a lot of frustration. For all the readings you should have a pen and paper ready to take notes as you read. Philosophical writing is concerned with advancing and defending arguments. Your task will be to try to reconstruct the arguments and to critically evaluate them.

The first reading of the text should be fairly quick. Your goal here should be to get a first, rough sense of the general argument the author is advancing and the rough structure of the text. What is his or her main thesis? (write this down!) Where in the text is s/he arguing for it? Where does s/he address objections? Where does he discuss qualifications? Where does s/he motivate the argument? Don't worry, if during the first reading you don't yet understand how precisely the author is arguing for a thesis.

The second reading should be devoted to giving a reconstruction of the argument that is as sympathetic as possible. Now you should spend a lot of time on trying to understand how the author supports the main thesis, and how s/he might address potential objections. Here it is usually useful to try to jot down the following: What are the premises of the argument? How are the premises themselves supported? For example the author might appeal to shared intuitions or might claim that the premises are self-evident. What are the steps which are meant to get the author from the premises to the conclusion? (Here words like 'because' and 'therefore' can

provide a clue.) You might think of yourself as engaging in a dialogue with the text here. Ask critical questions of the text, such as “You say that all simple ideas are copies of impressions. Why should I be compelled to accept this?” Then search the text for answers. At this stage your aim should not yet be to try to discover flaws or problems in the argument. Aim to make the argument as strong as possible.

Finally it is time to be critical. During a third reading you ought to try to see if you can uncover weaknesses in the arguments. If someone would want to disagree with a conclusion, there are two general ways in which one might attack the author’s arguments. One, you can disagree with one or more of the premises. That is you might accept that *if* we grant the premises, *then* the conclusion follows, but you might disagree with one or more of the premises. (But then you should ask yourself how you would respond to the attempt to motivate the premises.) Or, two, you might disagree with one or more of the steps in the argument. That is, you might be willing to accept the premises, but you might deny that this commits you to the conclusion as well. If you have an objection of the latter kind you should try to explain why it is possible to accept the author’s premises and yet deny his or her conclusions. (Of course you also might have objections of both kinds.)

A careful reading of a difficult text takes time. Learn to read patiently and slowly, and before you get frustrated, remember that even professional philosophers struggle with some of the texts you are reading. One of the most wonderful aspects of reading philosophy is that it allows you to engage in conversations with some of the deepest and most original thinkers. Enjoy the challenge!