Psychology 1551: Mind Perception

We find faces in the moon, armies in the clouds; and, by a natural propensity, if not corrected by experience and reflection, ascribe malice or good-will to every thing, that hurts or pleases us...trees, mountains, and streams are personified, and the inanimate parts of nature acquire sentiment and passion.

David Hume (1757), *The Natural History of Religion.*

How do we perceive minds? How should we understand the mind of a cow, a computer, a corporation, someone in pain, an idol, a hated enemy, or a person in a persistent vegetative state? How does our natural ability to perceive minds influence our tendency to attribute a mind to God or to the dead? These are questions about mind perception. This course explores how mind perception operates by extending it to extraordinary targets—kinds of minds beyond the prototypical idea of the human mind.

REQUIREMENTS

Comments on the Main Readings. Each week there will be main readings for the class (marked with * in the outline below). Your assignment is to do the reading and then turn in a page (or so) of comments on the reading set by class time that week. The comments should include at least 2 of these 4 elements: a summary (a few sentences summarizing the readings), an idea (the most interesting or important idea you found in the readings or had about the topic), a question (a query, comment, complaint, wish, deeply repressed desire, or issue for class discussion), or an example (something you have experienced that is relevant to the topic). Class discussion each week will center on these comments. This requirement accounts for 20% of your course grade.

Class Participation. Your discussion, questions, and comments in class will account for 20% of your course grade. Unexcused late arrival and/or absence from class are considered lapses in participation.

Individual Reports on the Special Readings. In addition to the main readings, there are special readings for each week’s topic. Each class member will select 2 to 4 of the weekly topics (depending on class size) and do one of the special (un-asterisked) readings those weeks. A 10-min. presentation on the special reading will be made in class that week (beginning 9-21). Your assignment is to present the special readings clearly and creatively, and to explain how the reading relates to the week’s topic. If you include Powerpoint or other computer media, please arrange to bring a laptop to class for your presentation. If you want to make any copies of handouts for class, contact Allison Gaffey in WJH 1456 (email gaffey@wjh.harvard.edu). This requirement accounts for 25% of your course grade.

Term Paper. A paper examining a specific topic in the study of mind perception accounts for 30% of your grade. This paper may take the form of a review, a theory, a case report, a research proposal, or a research report. A proposal for the paper (under one page) is due 11-2; a paper in APA style is due in class on 11-23; and an oral presentation of the paper in class should be prepared by 11-23 for presentation then or on 11-30.
DATES, OUTLINE, AND READINGS

* The main readings for each topic. Those not asterisked are for individual reports or background.

9-2 Organizational Meeting

9-14 Minds and Cryptominds  http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/~wegner/1551/


9-21 Minds of Animals  (individual reports begin)


9-28 Minds of Machines and Robots


**10-5 Mind of the Patient**


**10-19 Mind of the Enemy**


10-26 Mind of the Living Body


11-2 Mind of the Idol (term paper proposal due)

11-9   Group Mind


11-16 Supernatural Mind


11-23 Term paper presentations (term paper due)

11-30 Term paper presentations