PS373-15 Exploring Minds: Biological, Digital, and Mystical Varieties of Knowing

20/21

Department
Psychology
Level
Undergraduate Level 3
Module leader
Thomas Hills
Credit value
15
Module duration
12 weeks
Assessment
50% coursework, 50% exam
Study location
University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This module tackles questions about the structure of minds and how they give rise to knowledge, imagination, creativity, dreams, hallucinations, psychosis, and mystical experiences. Ultimately, the question we will attempt to address is what kinds of minds are possible, what can they do, what are there limits, and how do they originate? The answers to these questions are informed by philosophy, computer science, evolutionary ecology, psychiatry, science fiction, linguistics, anthropology, and human self-enhancement.

Module aims

This module will deal with research and ideas at the bleeding edge of how minds are constructed, how they evolve, how they can construct themselves, and how we can enhance learning, enable creativity, and alter our future and the way we understand reality. This module will cover topics in biological and human evolution, mental health, cognitive enhancement, divergent thinking, spirituality, psychedelics, creativity, introspection, and future technologies such as AI. This module will also cover cross-cultural perspectives on the human experience.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Biological and Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Mind
Generative Self-Construction and Cognitive Enhancement
Introspection, Mindfulness, and the Varieties of Mystical Experience
Divergent Minds and Pathology
AI

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Understand the ways in which minds change (evolve, learn, and age) from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives
- Understand the history and future of approaches to mind and its construction and maintenance
- Be able to frame the highs (spiritual) and lows (pathology) of experience in relation to naturalistic science, from perspectives of both disorder and adaptation

Indicative reading list

Pollan, M. (2019). How to change your mind: What the new science of psychedelics teaches us about consciousness, dying, addiction, depression, and transcendence. Penguin Books.

Wright, R. (2017). Why Buddhism is true: The science and philosophy of meditation and enlightenment. Simon and Schuster.

Shane, J. (2019). You Look Like a Thing and I Love You: How Artificial Intelligence Works and Why It's Making the World a Weirder Place. Voracious.

Hills, T. T. (2019). Neurocognitive free will. Proceedings of the Royal Society B, 286(1908), 20190510.

Hills, T. T. (2018). Masters of reality. Aeon. Online at: https://aeon.co/essays/why-did-shamanism-evolve-in-societies-all-around-the-globe

Hills, T. T. (2017). Does my algorithm have a mental health problem. Aeon. Online at: https://aeon.co/ideas/made-in-our-own-image-why-algorithms-have-mental-health-problems

Research element

Students will develop a project involving three elements: 1) scholarly research, combining information from lectures and other original research, 2) challenging personal experience and associated introspection framed in relation to course content, and 3) creative communication of their content along with an essay describing its mapping to the goals of the module.

Interdisciplinary

Student projects can enlist art, music, creative writing, or other disciplines in a creative format.

Subject specific skills

Understand methods to measure and evaluate mental constructs and knowledge representation.
Be versed in philosophical and other scientific approaches to mind and AI.
Understand scientific and cross-cultural methods for mind enhancement and expansion (i.e., learning).
Be able to explain components of biological and artificial minds and critically discuss their limitations.

Transferable skills

- effective communication skills to develop a cogent argument supported by relevant evidence alongside sensitivity to the needs and expectations of an audience
- AI literacy
- effective personal planning skills
- develop skills of self-reflection and introspection
- develop skills to enable other's capacity for mind expansion and frame alternative ways of thinking in a positive light.
- develop quantitative and qualitative skills for evaluating information and critically evaluating claims.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	24 sessions of 1 hour (16%)
Seminars	10 sessions of 1 hour (7%)
Private study	16 hours (11%)
Assessment	100 hours (67%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

reading and student study.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group C

	Weighting	Study time
Project	35%	35 hours
Reflective project and essay, to be described (3000 words max).		
Project plan	5%	5 hours
Details to be provided to students in classes. 300 words (max)		
participation exercises & questions	10%	10 hours
Online Examination	50%	50 hours
2-hour assessment on all topics covered in lectures and seminars. Students will see example questions in advance of the final assessment.		

- Online examination: No Answerbook required

Feedback on assessment

Assessed via annotated copy and feedback form.

Past exam papers for PS373

Availability

Pre-requisites

n/a

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- Year 3 of UPSA-C800 Undergraduate Psychology
- Year 4 of UPSA-C801 Undergraduate Psychology (with Intercalated year)
- Year 3 of UPSA-C804 Undergraduate Psychology with Education Studies

This module is Option list A for:

- Year 3 of UPSA-C804 Undergraduate Psychology with Education Studies

This module is Option list B for:

- Year 3 of UPHA-VL78 BA in Philosophy with Psychology
- Year 4 of UPHA-VL79 BA in Philosophy with Psychology (with Intercalated year)
- Year 1 of TPSS-C8P9 Postgraduate Taught Psychological Research

This module is Option list C for:

- Year 3 of UPSA-C802 Undergraduate Psychology with Linguistics