

Philosophy 462: Philosophy of Mind

Instructor: Dr. Robyn Bluhm
Office: 537 South Kedzie Hall
E-mail: rbluhm@msu.edu

Class meetings: Tuesday and Thursday 2:40 – 4:00, A228 Wells Hall
Office hours: Thursday 1:00 –2:00, or by appointment

Course description:

In this course we will examine the way in which the mind has been understood in philosophy and in psychology and cognitive science. Topics covered will include introspectionism, behaviorism, functionalism, psychoanalysis and neuroscience. We will critically assess these different perspectives, including the similarities and the differences between philosophical and psychological theories and mutual influences between the disciplines. In the case of psychological approaches to the mind, we will also emphasize the way in which assumptions about the nature of the mind shape the methods that are viewed as appropriate for studying the mind.

Required texts:

Kukla, A. and J. Walmsley. *Mind: A historical and philosophical introduction to the major theories*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. 2006. [K&W]

Flanagan, O. *The Science of the Mind* 2nd Edition. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 1991. [F]

Additional readings will be provided via D2L.

Learning outcomes:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Explain a number of different positions on the nature of the mind that have been held by philosophers and by psychologists
2. Describe how the course themes (see below) arise in both philosophy and psychology throughout the historical periods we will be considering.
3. Develop and present their own analyses and arguments about the debates and issues discussed in the course.

Course requirements

- Weekly reading responses (1 ½ to 2 pages each) – **15%**
- In class writing assignments - **10%**
- Two short essays (2 ½ to 3 pages each) – **20% (10% each)**
- Term paper (approximately 1,500 words) – **30%**
 - This further breaks down as follows: peer review 10%; final paper 15%; reflection 5%
- Final exam (scheduled by Registrar during exam period) – **25%**

Details of course requirements: (see also #5 under “Course Policies”)

Weekly reading responses: These short (1 ½ - 2 page) papers are due at the beginning of class on Tuesdays. They will be graded using a ✓- (does not meet expectations: ~40%), ✓ (meets expectations: ~80%), or ✓+ (exceeds expectations: ~100%) scale. The purposes of this assignment are to (1) encourage you to keep up with the readings for the course; (2) get you started thinking critically about the readings; and (2) prepare you to contribute to the class discussions for the week.

In each of the reading responses, you should do the following:

- (1) Briefly summarize the main topic(s) of the week’s reading or summarize in more detail one of the readings. In writing this part of the assignment, imagine you are explaining what we’re reading in class to a friend who doesn’t know anything about the topic.
- (2) Describe one thing you want to make sure we discuss in class, either because you don’t understand it yet or because you found it interesting.
- (3) Briefly explain one way in which you see connections between this week’s readings and (1) things we’ve read and/or talked about in previous classes, as well as (2) the course themes. (Note that these two things may be related to each other.)

In-class writing assignments: In some classes, we will take some time for you to write down your thoughts on something we have discussed in class. In some cases, I will give you specific prompts to write about. In others, the instructions will be more general (e.g., what is something interesting we discussed today? Is there something about the topics for today you are confused about and want us to discuss further?). These short assignments will be graded using the same grading scale as the reading responses.

Short essays: These essays will be graded using the grading scale posted above. The purposes of these assignments are (1) to help you to think critically about the course material and to develop an argument in support of your position; and (2) to help you to develop your skills in writing philosophy papers (and to give you feedback) before you write your term paper. We will talk further in class about how to write a philosophy paper, and resources have also been posted on D2L.

Topics for these assignments will be handed out two weeks before the paper is due. If you would like instead to write on a topic of your choosing, talk to me and get my approval. There will be three essay assignments over the course of the semester and you should do two of them. Since the due dates for all of these assignments are in the syllabus, you may want to plan ahead and choose which essays to write based on your other commitments.

Term paper: All components of this assignment will be graded using the grading scale posted above. The term paper will be an argumentative essay on a topic of your choosing. (I strongly recommend that you

discuss your topic with me.) Part of this course requirement will be giving and receiving peer feedback on paper drafts. You will also hand in a separate reflection paper with your final draft. We will talk more in class about what is involved in all three parts of the assignment.

“Final exam” paper: The purposes of this paper are to allow you to demonstrate that you have achieved the course objectives and to allow you to critically reflect on what you have learned in this course. Your main sources for this assignment will be the class readings, your notes, and the reading responses and in-class assignments you have completed over the course of the semester, though see note 2 below for additional resources.

For this assignment, you should select three or four issues we have covered during the semester, explain them (drawing on the materials listed in the previous paragraph), explain and defend your own position on the issue, and then identify the readings and other sources (including class discussions, information from other classes, or other relevant knowledge or experiences) that have shaped your position. You should also note how your position has changed since the beginning of the semester, either because you have outright changed your mind on the topic (not required!) or because you have new or stronger reasons related to your position, perhaps because you have considered a different and opposing view. Given that an important goal of this assignment is to show that you have learned something in this class, you should definitely avoid saying that your view is totally unchanged since the beginning of the class. (If this is the case for a given issue, write about something else.)

NOTES:

- (1) Although this is called your final paper for the course, you should realize that you can *and should* be working on it throughout the semester. In a sense, you will have to do this, because your in-class writing assignments and your reading responses will be important resources for this paper (see note 3 below). As you identify topics that you think you might like to write about, you should start making notes about relevant points that you might work into your final paper.
- (2) You are welcome to discuss your ideas with others in the class (including me) and *encouraged* to bring up relevant discussion points during class. [If you say something in your paper along the lines of “When we were talking about x in class, I asked people whether they agreed with me that y and was surprised when someone said z . I thought about it, and still think that y because...” (or, (I now think that q because...”), that would be *awesome*.
- (3) That said, be very careful to cite your sources, including class readings, external readings (including websites), discussions with others (whether in class or elsewhere), and your own reading responses and in-class writing assignments). If you are unsure about how to do this, talk to me, or bring it up in class, since others will have the same questions.

Grading scale:

Final grade	Percentage
4.0	90 – 100
3.5	85 – 89.9
3.0	80 – 84.9
2.5	75 – 79.9
2.0	70 – 74.9
1.5	65 – 69.9
1.0	60 – 64.9
0.0	<59.9

Course themes

What is psychology the study of?

Different schools of psychology have answered this question differently, and their answers have implications for the methods used to study the mind as well as for what is accepted as a good explanation of some aspect of thought or behavior.

Where does knowledge come from?

This is traditionally a philosophical question. The two main answers fall into the categories of rationalism (which says that knowledge comes from reasoning and is based on innate knowledge) and empiricism (which says that all knowledge comes from experience). But different approaches to psychology have also taken a stance on this issue.

Are we conscious of everything that is in our minds?

This question can be concerned with the contents of the mind (thoughts, ideas, perceptions) and also with mental processes.

What is the relationship between the mind and the body? What is the relationship between psychology and biology/neuroscience?

The mind/body problem is a traditional question in philosophy of mind – it asks about the relationship between the mind and the body. In science (and in philosophy of science), the question is a bit different – it asks about the relationship between psychology and neuroscience, or between theories/explanations in psychology and theories/explanations in neuroscience. The first is a *metaphysical* question; the second is an *epistemological* question.

How are theories of the mind constructed?

Some preliminary suggestions include: folk psychology, observation, experiment, introspection, computer modeling. This theme gets us into some questions in philosophy of science that we'll be addressing throughout the semester, including questions about the nature of observable versus theoretical entities, about reduction (which is related to the mind/body problem but also to the issue of different levels of explanation), and about the nature of explanation.

Course policies:

1. Students are expected to attend classes and to come prepared to discuss the assigned readings for the class. While you are doing the readings for the class, you should make note of any questions or problems you had and raise them in class. Similarly, you should be prepared to contribute anything you found particularly interesting in the readings.
2. Do not use cell phones, or send text messages (or paper notes), or talk with your neighbor in class. All of these activities are disruptive and disrespectful of others in the class. Arrive on time for class and don't leave early.
3. The attached schedule of readings may be revised if we spend more or less time than anticipated on some of the course material. If it is revised, a copy of the new reading list will be posted on D2L and an announcement will also be made in class that the new version of the list has been posted.
4. If you miss a class, including classes early in the semester that you miss because you registered late, you are responsible for getting the notes from a classmate. If you miss an in-class assignment, you are responsible for providing documentation that justifies your absence (e.g. a doctor's note). If you cannot produce appropriate documentation, you will receive a grade of zero for that test/assignment.
5. Late **short essays** and **final term papers** will be accepted up to one week after they are due, but there will be a late penalty of once letter grade per day that the assignment is late. Saturday and Sunday count as one day. If you believe that you deserve an extension on an assignment or if you miss an assignment due to, e.g., an extended period of illness or a family emergency, you must make arrangements with me as soon as possible. As with missed tests, documentation may be required to support your request for an extension or a make-up assignment. In addition to handing in a paper copy of your assignment in class, you should also be required to upload an electronic version of the assignment through D2L. Instructions for doing so will be made available on D2L. If your paper copy and the electronic copy of the assignment are not identical, you will receive a grade of zero for the assignment. If you do not upload your assignment to D2L, you will receive a grade of zero for the assignment. **In order to count as being handed in on time, both a hard copy of the assignment (turned in in class) and an electronic copy (turned in using D2L) must have been received by the due date.**

Reading responses are due in class on the day the reading is covered. **Late reading responses will not be accepted and you may not hand in these assignments by e-mail.**

Rough drafts of your term paper are due in class on November 17 and will not be accepted late (see limited exceptions above). If you do not circulate rough drafts to your peer reviewers by the deadline, you will receive a grade of zero for the peer review component of the assignment *even if you review others' papers*. Similarly, you are required to attend the in-class peer review session on November 22 and will receive a grade of zero for the peer review component of the assignment, as well as the reflection component of the assignment *even if you review others' papers and/or hand in the reflection*.

That said, I recognize that there are situations that justify making exceptions to these rules. These include prolonged illness, bereavement, family emergencies, and alien abductions. In these and similar circumstances, I will work with you to help you to complete the required work, but you should know that (1) documenting of extenuating circumstances may be required, and (2) in some cases we will also need to work with your advisor or other people who can help you to stay, or to get back, on track with your classes. In particular, you should be aware of MSU's [grief absence policy](#).

6. Students are required to keep any work that has been graded and returned until the end of the semester. This is in your best interests; if you believe that an error has been made with regard to your final grade, you will need to show this work in support of your claim.

7. Any student who is found to have plagiarized any part of the course work will fail the course. Plagiarism is preventable; if you have any doubts or questions about what counts as plagiarism, you should talk to me. Resources for preventing plagiarism are posted on D2L.

8. More generally, students are expected to adhere to the Spartan Code of Honor, which reads: "As a Spartan, I will strive to uphold values of the highest ethical standard. I will practice honesty in my work, foster honesty in my peers, and take pride in knowing that honor is worth more than grades. I will carry these values beyond my time as a student at Michigan State University, continuing the endeavor to build personal integrity in all that I do."

MSU policies that will apply in this course:

[taken (mostly) verbatim from <https://www.msu.edu/~ombud/classroom-policies/syllabus-faq.html#question3>]

1. **Academic Honesty:** Article 2.III.B.2 of the [Student Rights and Responsibilities \(SRR\)](#) states that "The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards." In addition, the (insert name of unit offering course) adheres to the policies on academic honesty as specified in General Student Regulations 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades; the all-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades; and Ordinance 17.00, Examinations. (See [Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide](#) and/or the MSU Web site: www.msu.edu.) Therefore, unless authorized by your instructor, you are expected to complete all course assignments, including homework, lab work, quizzes, tests and exams, without assistance from any source. You are expected to develop original work for this course; therefore, you may not submit course work you completed for another course to satisfy the requirements for this course. Also, you are not authorized to use the www.allmsu.com Web site to complete any course work in this course. Students who violate MSU academic integrity rules may receive a penalty grade, including a failing grade on the assignment or in the course. Contact your instructor if you are unsure about the appropriateness of your course work. (See also the [Academic Integrity](#) webpage.)

2. **Limits to confidentiality.** Essays, journals, and other materials submitted for this class are generally considered confidential pursuant to the University's student record policies. However, students should be aware that University employees, including instructors, may not be able to maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues to protect the health and safety of MSU community members and others. As the instructor, I must report the following information to other University offices (including the Department of Police and Public Safety) if you share it with me:

--Suspected child abuse/neglect, even if this maltreatment happened when you were a child,

--Allegations of sexual assault or sexual harassment when they involve MSU students, faculty, or staff, and

--Credible threats of harm to oneself or to others.

These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In almost all cases, it will be your decision whether you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting you are encouraged to make an appointment with the MSU Counseling Center.

3. Accommodations for Students with Disabilities (from the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD): Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at rcpd.msu.edu. Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a Verified Individual Services Accommodation ("VISA") form. Please present this form to me at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (test, project, etc.). Requests received after this date may not be honored.

4. Commercialized Lecture Notes: Commercialization of lecture notes and university-provided course materials not permitted in this course.

5. Disruptive Behavior: Article 2.III.B.4 of the [Student Rights and Responsibilities \(SRR\)](#) for students at Michigan State University states: "The student's behavior in the classroom shall be conducive to the teaching and learning process for all concerned." Article 2.III.B.10 of the [SRR](#) states that "The student and the faculty share the responsibility for maintaining professional relationships based on mutual trust and civility." [General Student Regulation 5.02](#) states: "No student shall . . . interfere with the functions and services of the University (for example, but not limited to, classes . . .) such that the function or service is obstructed or disrupted. Students whose conduct adversely affects the learning environment in this classroom may be subject to disciplinary action through the Student Judicial Affairs office.

6. Attendance: Students whose names do not appear on the official class list for this course may not attend this class. Students who fail to attend the first four class sessions or class by the fifth day of the semester, whichever occurs first, may be dropped from the course.