

PHIL 306: Philosophy of Mind

McGill University

Term: Fall 2022
Time: M,T,R 16:35-17:25hrs
Location: EDUC 129

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Course Overview

This course will address philosophical questions at the center of debates in the philosophy of mind, such as the following: Are mental states just human brain states? If not, how is it possible for our mental states to cause our behavior and other physical phenomena? Could machines have mental states? What are the defining characteristics of the mind? Is consciousness one such characteristic? What is consciousness? How does it arise from the brain? Is being able to represent the world around you –to see your computer screen, feel your desk chair, have thoughts and desires about lunch– a defining characteristic of the mind? How do mental states through which we come to represent our surroundings come to have the content they have? For example, your vision allows you to represent yourself as being in a large classroom; so you have a state that carries the information “this is a large classroom”. But what is it about such state that makes it be about the classroom (as opposed to the gym or the park)?

We will approach these questions in two ways. On the one hand, we will review classical philosophical views about what the mind is and its relation to our brain and other physical systems. Some of the views we will look at are substance dualism, logical behaviourism, identity physicalism, and functionalism. In doing so, we will learn the arguments that have been put forward in their favor, as well as their shortcomings. Learning the problems raised for such views and some responses to them will give us an overview of the debates in which they take part.

There are also philosophical answers to some of the above questions that are not derived from a particular view of the nature of mental states. For example, there are proposed answers to the question of what consciousness is and to the question of how mental states come to have the content they have. We will review some of these answers and their consequences for different theories of the mind.

Learning objectives

Engaging conscientiously in the activities planned for this course will allow you to:

1. Become familiarized with classical problems and views central to the philosophy of mind

2. Identify views and reconstruct their supporting arguments in the philosophy of mind literature
3. Critically evaluate philosophical views and arguments
4. Clearly communicate in writing i) your own position in a debate within the philosophy of mind and ii) your defense of this position against potential objections.

Course material & myCourses

All reading material and other course material will be distributed through myCourses.

There is no textbook for this course, but the following books are useful resources: Jaegwon Kim's *Philosophy of Mind*, Westview Press; John Heil's *Philosophy of Mind: A Contemporary Introduction*, Routledge; and Tim Crane's *The Mechanical Mind*, Routledge.

Assignments and grades

The assignment and assessment distribution below is designed to promote your learning and improvement of philosophical skills. It will also increase your chances of success in achieving the course objectives. You will write your final essay step by step, receive constant peer feedback, and complete low-stakes assignments.¹

20%	<p><i>Five 100–200w reactions to texts</i></p> <p>Choose any five weeks from weeks 3 to 13. For each chosen week, submit either a mini summary or a discussion question on one of the readings for the week. You will submit it via myCourses by the end of the Monday class. The lowest grade from your five reactions will be dropped at the end of the term. Each of the four reactions left will be worth 5%.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The mini summaries will include i) a description of the main view or problem discussed in the reading and ii) an explanation of the reasons in favor of such a view or the proposed solution to the problem. – The discussion questions will be philosophical questions, explicitly pointing to a passage in the text. You will i) formulate and explain the question, and ii) provide an educated guess of the answer, informed by text. <p>For details, see “Instructions & evaluation: reactions to texts” on myCourses.</p>
10%	<p><i>Classwork</i></p> <p>Polls, argument reconstructions, and other classwork activities.</p>
40%	<p><i>2000–2500w Essay written in stages</i></p> <p>Choose any topic from weeks 3 to 13.</p> <p>Stage 1: 600–700w description of a philosophical view or problem (10%)</p> <p>Written summary of one of the views or one of the problems discussed in the texts. For details, see “Instructions & evaluation: stage 1 of essay”.</p> <p>Stage 2: 600–700w elaboration of your position on the view or problem (10%)</p>

¹ Feel free to contact me for information about the research behind the design.

You will describe, explain, and provide an initial motivation for your own position with respect to the view or problem you presented in stage 1. For details, see “Instructions & evaluation: stage 2 of essay”.

Stage 3: 600–700w elaboration and response to a potential objection (10%)

You will present and explain a potential objection to your position, as well as defend your position from the objection by responding to it. For details, see “Instructions & evaluation: stage 3 of essay”.

Stage 4: Redrafting written work in stages 1–3 in essay format (10%)

Based on the peer feedback received for your work in stages 1–3, redraft your written work into an essay format, with introduction, conclusion, footnotes, and references. This work will be submitted as your final essay. For details, see “Instructions & evaluation: stage 4 of essay”.

* All work for stages 1–4 is to be uploaded to myCourses and the peer review platform by **23:59hrs** on the due date (see schedule below).

* Please note that submitting the final essay is a precondition for receiving a passing grade in the course.

30% *Three peer review questionnaires (10% each)*

You will answer three questionnaires to provide anonymous feedback to one of your classmates on their written work at each stage. I will provide instructions on these activities in due course.

Policy for contacting the instructor and TA

Office hours: If you have substantive questions, comments, or would like to discuss any philosophical issue on the course material, please choose a timeslot [here](#) to see me and [here](#) to see your TA during office hours.

If the need to discuss one of your assigned grades arises, please contact your TA - he will gladly discuss it with you during office hours and will inform you about further steps in the procedure for grade complaints.

E-mail: Substantive matters will not be addressed by email. On all other matters of the course (not specified in the syllabus), you are welcome to email me or your TA. Please allow a 24-hour response to your email. If you have not received a reply within 48 (business) hours, please send a short follow-up.

Policy for late work and extensions

In general, extensions for the written work in stages 1–4 will be granted only for good reason and **cannot be granted for more than 2 days**, given the logistics of the peer review system we will be implementing. I will consider requests for extensions when the request is made with at least 48 hours before the due date. Please let me know as soon as possible if you anticipate needing an extension. **Reactions to readings and peer feedback are not eligible for extensions.**

Policies on language of submission and academic integrity

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures: www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

Schedule (subject to change)

Week 1 Sept. 01-09	Reading philosophy, Mind-body dualism (All readings must be done before Tuesday, September 6th) <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Payne, "Arguments" and "Fallacies"- Concepción, "How to Read Philosophy"- Excerpt from Kim, "1. Introduction"- Excerpt from Jacquette, "Descartes' Arguments for the Mind-Body Distinction"
Week 2 Sept. 12-16	Mind-body dualism and the mind-body problem <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Jim Pryor, "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy"- Excerpt from Kim, "2. Mind as Immaterial Substance"- Excerpt from McWeeny's "Princess Elisabeth and the Mind-Body Problem"
Week 3 Sept. 19-23	Behaviourism <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ryle, "Descartes' Myth"- Putnam, "Brains and Behavior"
Week 4 Sept. 26-30	Mind/Brain Identity & Physicalism <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Smart, "Sensations and Brain Processes"- Fodor, "Special Sciences, or the Disunity of Science as a Working Hypothesis"- Excerpt from Kim, "4. Mind as Brain"
Week 5 Oct. 03-07	Functionalism & the Classical Computational Theory of Mind <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Putnam, "The Nature of Mental States"- Crane, "6. Computation and representation"
Week 6 Oct. 10-14	Functionalism & the Classical Computational Theory of Mind <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Block, "Troubles with Functionalism"- Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs"- Crane, "7. Can a computer think?"

October 17 - Stage 1 of essay due	
Week 7 Oct. 17-21	Psychophysical relations and mental causation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Davidson, "Mental events" - Kim, "The many problems of mental causation"
October 24 - 1st peer feedback due	
Week 8 Oct. 24-28	Mental content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Excerpts from Crane, "3. Mental Representation" and from Kim, "9. Mental Content" - Excerpt from McLaughlin, "What is Wrong with Correlational Psychosemantics?"
November 7 - Stage 2 of essay due	
Week 9 Oct./Nov. 31-04	Mental content: narrow and wide <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Excerpt from Putnam, "The Meaning of Meaning" - Excerpt from Burge, "Individualism and the Mental"
November 14 - 2nd peer feedback due	
Week 10 Nov. 07-11	Phenomenal Consciousness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nagel, "What is it like to be a bat?" - Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia"
November 21 - Stage 2 of essay due	
Week 11 Nov. 14-18	The explanatory gap, the hard problem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Excerpt from Chalmers, "Part II - The Irreducibility of Consciousness" - Excerpt from Kim, "10. Consciousness and the Mind-Body Problem"
November 28 - Stage 3 of essay due	
Week 12 Nov. 21-25	Representationalist Theories of Consciousness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Harman, "The intrinsic quality of experience" - Kind, "Transparency and Representationalist Theories of Consciousness" - Excerpt from Kim, "9. What is Consciousness?"
November 28 - Stage 3 of essay due	
Week 13 Nov./Dec. 28-02	"Wildcard" week
December 5 - 3rd peer feedback due	
December 12 - Take-home exam (stage 4, final essay) due	