

Philosophy of Mind

Professor: Bryce Huebner

Office: 234 New North

Office hours: W 12:00 - 14:30; by appointment

Course meets:

M & W 15:30 - 16:45 pm

Location: Car Barn 300

In this course, we'll examine questions about what minds are, what kinds of things have them, how they are supposed to work (and how they sometimes seem to break down). Along the way, we'll be addressing questions about the nature of agency, conscious experience, and 'the self'; we'll try to figure out what it's like to be an octopus, and what it's like to experience different kinds of mental illnesses; and we'll close by asking whether it's possible for us to change the way that our minds work, using simple forms of meditative practice

Course Requirements:

10%	Ongoing	This will be a discussion-oriented class, and you will be expected to take part in the class discussion.
You must write three short papers over the course of the semester. These papers should be modeled on the short articles from Aeon that we will be reading all semester. You can write on any issue that we have addressed in class, or you can address a topic that is more suited to your own interests (if you chose the latter option, you must clear your topic with me beforehand).		
25%	Prior to 9/30	Submit a brief paper (max: 750 words)
25%	Prior to 10/28	Submit a brief paper (max: 750 words)
25%	Prior to 12/2	Submit a brief paper (max: 750 words)
15%	12/17	At the end of the semester, you must write a brief narrative detailing what you have learned in the class, as well as what questions you feel have been left unresolved, and what it would take to address them adequately.

Grading Criteria:

Brief papers will receive a 'B+' so long as they 1) clearly articulate the claim that is being defended, 2) are relatively well organized, 3) rely on fairly strong evidence and arguments, and 4) are stylistically clear—thereby presenting a *competent* argument. 'A' grades will be awarded when papers *excel* in every one of these categories, exhibiting a clear capacity for *doing philosophy*—and 'A-' grades will be awarded where papers excel in one of these areas. 'B' grades will be awarded to papers that are weaker in one of these areas—but that are still satisfactory. 'C' grades will be awarded to papers that are weak in two or more of these categories; and 'D' grades will only be awarded to papers that are weak all categories or that omit one category altogether (e.g., by lacking a thesis or lacking arguments for a thesis).

Paper deadlines:

If you need an extension on a paper, please ask *before* the due date. In general, I will be willing to give a 48-hour grace period (no questions asked). If you are still having trouble completing the assignment after that, you must set up an appointment to go over your ideas and set a schedule for finishing the paper. Unless an extension is granted in advance, assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a grade (A- to a B+, B+ to a B, etc.) for each day they are late.

Appealing a grade:

You can appeal any grade that you feel does not accurately represent the work you have done. All appeals for re-evaluation must be made in writing, no more than two weeks after your paper is returned, and no sooner than 48 hours after you receive your grade. Requests must provide a compelling argument for raising the grade, but an agreement to re-evaluate a paper is no guarantee of a better grade, and it can result in lower grades if there are more serious problems that were missed on the first reading.

The honor code:

The Georgetown University Honor pledge requires you to be honest in your academic endeavors and to hold yourself to the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life. I expect you to be familiar with the letter and the spirit of this pledge; and, I will enforce the Honor Code by reporting any and all suspected cases of academic dishonesty.

Accessibility and diversity:

One finds a great deal of diversity in teaching and learning styles in a modern university. These styles may not always mesh in ways that are conducive to the success and wellbeing of everyone in a course. But there are often ways of improving things. I am happy to discuss the structure of this course, and to work with the learning styles people have to the best of my abilities. So please feel free to talk to me in office hours. I sincerely think that every student is entitled to a meaningful and stimulating classroom experience! Disabled students and students on record with the university as requiring particular accommodations, please let me know that this is the case, in confidence, during the first few weeks of the semester—and please take advantage of services provided by the university. Finally, please let me know if you learn during the semester that something would make the classroom accessible.

Sexual misconduct:

As a faculty member and an educator, it is my responsibility to help create a safe learning environment on our campus. Georgetown University and its faculty are committed to supporting survivors of sexual misconduct, including relationship violence and sexual assault. And university policy requires all faculty members to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role is to coordinate the University's response to sexual misconduct. But Georgetown also has a number of fully confidential professional resources who can provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct. These resources include: [Jen Schweer](#) (202.687.0323) Associate Director of Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention; [Erica Shirley](#) (202.687.6985) Trauma Specialist (CAPS). More information about campus resources and reporting sexual misconduct can be found at <http://sexualassault.georgetown.edu>.

Mind your manners:

Philosophy is best done collectively and collaboratively; however, some of the questions we will be discussing in this class may generate contentious claims, spirited discussions, vehement disagreements, and trenchant criticisms. This is at least part of what doing philosophy is all about. In discussing, disagreeing, criticizing, and arguing with one another, we must make an effort to remain courteous and respectful. I promise to do my best to raise philosophical issues and to start philosophical discussions in ways that are as sensitive as possible to the variety of viewpoints and opinions that we are sure to find among the members of this class. But I will only be able to do this if each of you helps to create an atmosphere where we can develop ideas in a friendly and welcoming environment where we all learn from one another. Perhaps more importantly, if you want to disagree with someone, or if you want to offer

a criticism of their viewpoint, be sure to offer reasons for the approach that you are suggesting. If we reason through things together, we are sure to have a great semester!

Tentative course reading list:

	8/29 No reading
	9/5 Peter Adamson , What can Avicenna teach us about the mind body problem ; (Optional podcast: Into Thin Air: Avicenna on the Soul)
9/10 Rene Descartes on animals and machines; Jen McWeeny , “Princess Elisabeth and the Mind–Body Problem”	9/12 Abebe Birhane , Descartes was wrong: ‘a person is a person through other persons’
9/17 Sy Montgomery , Deep Intellect	9/19 Mazviita Chirimuuta , The Reality of Color Is Perception
9/24 Hedda Hassel Mørch , Is Matter Conscious?	9/26 Anil K. Seth , The real problem ; (Optional: Susan Schneider, Spacetime Emergence, Panpsychism & the Nature of Consciousness)
10/1 Jenny Judge , Getting in the groove	10/3 Barbara Gail Montero , Against flow
	10/10 Thomas Metzinger , Are you sleepwalking now?
10/15 Chris Frith , Our illusory sense of agency has a deeply important social purpose	10/17 Laura Spinney , The shared past that wasn’t
10/22 David Livingstone Smith , A theory of creepiness	10/24 Marc Bain , The neuroscience of cool
10/29 Keith Frankish , Whatever you think, you don’t necessarily know your own mind	10/31 Şerife Tekin , Self evident ; (optional Rachel Aviv , How a Young Woman Lost her Identity)
11/5 Lisa Bortolotti , Confabulation: why telling ourselves stories makes us feel ok	11/7 Galen Strawson , I am not a story
11/12 Nina Strohminger , The self is moral	11/14 Carolyn Dicey Jennings , I attend, therefore I am
11/19 Elyn Saks , A tale of mental illness from the inside	
11/26 Mark Brown , On having a fucked brain	11/28 Samir Chopra , The usefulness of dread
12/3 Andreas Elpidorou , The quiet alarm	12/5 Bronwyn Finnigan , Can we reinvent ourselves
12/10 Thupten Jinpa , Two Exercises for Turning Intention into Motivation	