

PHI376: Philosophy of Mind

Instructor: Kevan Edwards

Class sessions: Monday/Wednesday 12:45 - 2:05; Life Sciences Building, Rm 100.

Office hours: TBA, but please do not hesitate to contact me via email.

Contact: kedwar02@syr.edu

Introduction to the content of the course

This course will cover major issues and movements in philosophy of mind. Our focus will be work in the past century on foundational questions about the nature of mental states and the relationship between mental phenomenon and the (rest of the) physical world. We will discuss approaches including Dualism, Behaviorism, Identity Theory, Functionalism, as well as Eliminativism and Instrumentalism. Other potential topics may include mental content, classical versus connectionist (neural network) models of mental processes, theories of mental representation, consciousness, the so-called extended mind, the language of thought, modularity.

Readings will be a combination of chapters from a required textbook and primary sources (mostly journal articles). Students should expect the readings to be difficult, especially the aforementioned primary sources. Requirements will include regular short assignments, several exams, and at least one major project that will require substantial independent work.

Course goals

- **Learn about the basic topics.** This goal should be obvious.
- **Learn about some foundational philosophical ideas and distinctions**, many of which are relevant to other philosophical sub-disciplines and have the potential to apply much more broadly.
- **Develop basic analytical skills.** These include the ability to read, understand, and critically engage with difficult texts and arguments, as well as the ability to construct and strengthen one's own argumentation. This also includes improving the clarity of one's (academic) writing. Here is a reason to take this goal seriously: basic analytic skills are very "portable"; they are relevant to every academic discipline, and beyond. Upper-level philosophy classes are an especially good place to hone these skills.

Course nuts and bolts

Readings. You need to purchase one text: Ravenscroft, Ian. (2005). *Philosophy of Mind: A Beginner's Guide*. Oxford University Press. The book is available through many of the usual sources (e.g. Amazon) in both print and electronic form. Please make sure that you have the textbook for the third week of class. Other readings will be made available as PDF files on the course Blackboard site. You will need to be able to download readings on a regular basis. Please make sure that whatever format you choose to work with for both the textbook and additional readings is effective for you. You will need to do some difficult and potentially frustrating reading. You need to be able to take notes effectively. You need to be able to have access to the readings and your notes during class.

Blackboard. We will be making heavy use of the course Blackboard site. Make sure you check this on a regular basis. You are responsible for any information that is posted on Blackboard.

Email. I will rely on email for communication outside of class. Make sure you check your SU email account on a regular basis. You are responsible for any information that I send you via email. When you send me email, please put “PHI376” somewhere in the subject line. I try to stay on top of email, but sometimes things slip through the cracks. If you send me an email to which you expect a response and do not hear back from me in a few days, please do not hesitate to send me a gentle followup.

Course requirements and grade-related policies

*This is a part of the course that is especially subject to change.

Regular assignments/quizzes	25%	Due throughout the semester
Exam 1	20%	Date TBA (roughly ½-way through the semester)
Exam 2	20%	On the scheduled day during the final exam period.
Paper	20%	Due the last day of class.
Attendance & participation	15%	

Assignments/quizzes. There will be short assignments and potentially quizzes throughout the semester. You need to complete all of these and will be penalized for any that are late or missing. Only a few assignments will be graded and you will not know in advance which ones. Your grade for the assignments/quizzes will be calculated as follows:

- Out of the assignments/quizzes that I grade, your lowest grade will be dropped and the remaining assignments will be averaged.
- 1% will be deducted from your overall Assignment grade for each late assignment. 3% will be deducted from your overall assignment grade for each missing assignment. This deduction applies to all assignments/quizzes, including those that have not been graded.

Exams. Exams will be written in class and during the scheduled exam period. Exams may also have a take-home component. The exams will be based on study questions that will be made available as we work through the relevant material in class, although exams may also involve some new questions. Any take-home component will be made available at least a week before the exam and will be due at the start of the exam.

Paper. More information about the paper will be made available during the semester. There will be some suggested paper topics but there will also be room for you to come up with your own topic. If you want to come up with your own topic, you need to have it approved by the instructor well in advance. The paper project will require you to do a substantial amount of independent work, including independent research. You are expected to show that you have engaged in a topic beyond what we have covered in class.

Attendance & participation. I do not have a strict formula for calculating this component of your grade, but some guidelines are given below. If you have any questions or are wondering where you stand with respect to this component of your grade partway through the semester, please contact the instructor. Here is how I will calculate your A&P grade:

- I will start by calculating what your grade in the class would be without this component and will use this as your default A&P grade.

- Your default A&P grade will be bumped up for such things as constructive participation in class and effective use of resources outside of class (taking advantage of any office hours, doing additional research, etc.)
- You can miss one class without penalty; after that, your A&P grade will be reduced by 2% for each unexcused absence.
- You can be late for one class without penalty; after that, your A&P grade will be reduced by 1% for each unexcused lateness or other reason you miss a substantial portion of class without explanation.

Prolonged absences. If you are or are going to be absent from class for more than one day, I strongly recommend that you contact the Dean of Students Office (<https://ese.syr.edu/dean-of-students/services/>). If you supply appropriate documentation, they will notify your home college and the instructors teaching your courses.

Submitting work. All work needs to be submitted online through Blackboard.

Seeing your grades. I will post grades for specific course requirements on Blackboard. I will do my best to keep this up to date. I will try to turn off any feature on Blackboard that attempts to calculate how you are doing in the class overall, since I have found that this information can easily end up being inaccurate and/or misleading. If you want to know how you are doing in the class overall, you should figure this out yourself based on the grades that you have received for individual requirements and how they are weighted overall.

WARNING: The cost of failing to complete assignments will add up very quickly. If you fail to hand in an assignment and it is one that I end up grading, that will have a very significant effect on your grade. You should plan to hand in every assignment on time, even if it is not your best work.

WARNING: A significant part of your grade will not be determined until the the end of semester. If you are worried about this, there are things you can do. The most obvious thing is to talk to me about potential paper projects that you can hope to complete relatively early in the semester.

WARNING: The paper you need to write for this class will require a substantial amount of independent work. You might not want to leave the paper until the end of the semester, which is always very busy. Again, if you are keen to get going on the paper project earlier in the semester, please don't hesitate to contact me.

COVID-related absences

If you enter quarantine (exposure to a COVID-positive person) or isolation (confirmed COVID infection) you must work with the office of the Dean of Students; they will notify faculty about your inability to attend class in person. If this happens, I will be happy to work with you to figure out a way to keep up with the course material and requirements.

If anything goes wrong

If you need to miss a class (or classes), reschedule a coarse requirement, or you want any other kind of accommodation, *p/lease* think about how you can be both professional and proactive. Here are some suggestions that can go a long way as far as motivating me (and other instructors) to take your situation seriously:

- **If possible, contact the instructor in advance.** This shows that you are being proactive and it gives us both time to figure out a solution.
- **Make suggestions regarding possible solutions.** Don't just contact the instructor announcing that you won't be able to do something; have a plan and explain what you are going to do about the issue and how the instructor can help.
- **Provide documentation.** You can be creative with this, but also be reasonable. A note from a friend or family member is not worth very much. A receipt indicating that you have made an appointment with a health professional or counsellor or that you have sent your laptop in for repair shows that you are facing an issue and that you are already doing something about it.

Religious observances

Syracuse University's Religious Observances Policy recognizes the diversity of faiths represented in the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their traditions. Under the policy, students are given an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance, provided they notify their instructors no later than the academic drop deadline. For observances occurring before the drop deadline, notification is required at least two academic days in advance. Students may enter their observances in MySlice under Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances/Add a Notification.

Wellness and mental health

The past few years have been increasingly stressful for many people and this has had a noticeable effect in the classroom. If you begin to suspect that you might be facing any relevant issues, please do not hesitate to address the issues and to take advantage of the resources that the university makes available. Below is some text from the university that I strongly recommend taking seriously.

Mental health and overall well-being are significant predictors of academic success. As such it is essential that during your college experience you develop the skills and resources effectively to navigate stress, anxiety, depression and other mental health concerns. Please familiarize yourself with the range of resources the Barnes Center provides and seek out support for mental health concerns as needed. Counseling services are available 24/7, 365 days, at 315.443.8000. I encourage you to explore the resources available through the Wellness Leadership Institute.

Use of class materials

Original class materials (handouts, assignments, tests, etc.) including any recordings of class sessions are the intellectual property of the course instructor. You may download these materials for your use in this class. However, you may not provide these materials to other parties (e.g., web sites, social media, other students) without permission. Doing so is a violation of intellectual property law and of the student code of conduct.

Academic Integrity

Issues having to do with Academic Integrity will be taken very seriously in this class. You need to read and sign a separate document about this before any of your work will be graded.

Disability resources

Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. I invite any student to contact me to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success and to collaborate with the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) in this process.

If you would like to discuss disability-accommodations or register with CDR, please visit Center for Disability Resources. Please call (315) 443-4498 or email disabilityresources@syr.edu for more detailed information. The CDR is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic accommodations and will work with the student to develop an access plan. Since academic accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact CDR as soon as possible to begin this process.

How to succeed in this class

Attend and be on time for every class session. Once you start to cut corners, things can easily slide downhill.

Take advantage of the time that you spend in class. You are here anyway, you might as well use the time to learn the material, to clarify things that you do not understand, and to ask questions about anything that interests you.

Do all of the required readings and get all of the assigned work submitted on time. Again, once you start cutting corners, it is easy to slide downhill. It is easier not to let yourself make any exceptions in the first place. Not being happy with a piece of work is not a good reason to miss a deadline. I can't make promises about this, but if you submit a piece of work that you are not happy with and ask for a few days to resubmit an improved version, I am likely to be sympathetic.

***Get organized and then stay organized.** This is my main piece of advice and I can't do enough to underscore its importance. In my experience, the key to doing well in college is not to be super smart or creative or to have a lot of relevant background knowledge; the key is being organized and developing and maintaining good work habits. This is not trivial; for many of us, figuring out systems that are effective and that we can sustain requires commitment, self-reflection, and insight.